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# CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL

THE MAGAZINE FOR CORPORATE MEETING AND INCENTIVE TRAVEL PLANNERS

## Oceans of Incentives

The Cruise Industry Is Full  
Steam Ahead With New  
Offerings for Groups  
PAGE 30



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## The Event Safety Net

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IMEX America 2016, October 18–20 in Las Vegas, promises to match or exceed the success of last year's show (pictured). **PAGE 16**



Experts and planners weigh in on meetings risk management concerns, ranging from personal safety to cyber security. **PAGE 40**



Positive working relationships with suppliers are the key to successful meetings and events. **PAGE 46**



## Publisher's Message

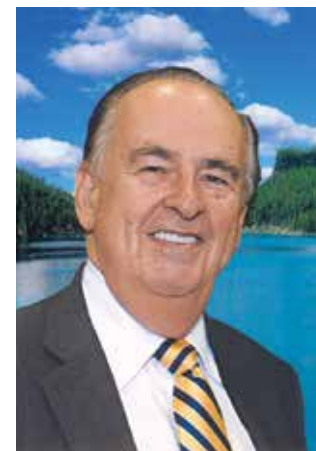
### The Greatest Show on Earth

This slogan, first coined in the 1800s by Dan Rice to describe his circus, became synonymous with the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, and today IMEX America is coming pretty close to matching this revered status. Hardly a circus, but the depth and breadth of the offerings in business, education and networking, not to mention the extraordinary dimensions of the show floor, make IMEX America the only place to be in mid-October. This year, IMEX America, which will take place again in

Las Vegas at the Sands Expo and Convention Center at The Venetian/The Palazzo takes place October 18–20.

IMEX America's two key themes on the docket this year are the Sharing Economy and Where Personal Meets Professional or how personal development and well-being can benefit the individual both in and out of the office.

For more information, see page 16 for "The Talk of the Town: A Whole World of Business, Education and Networking in Just Three Days in October," which also includes the ambitious schedule for Smart Monday (on page 17), powered by MPI, which will kick off IMEX America on October 17. In addition, meet our advertisers, many of whom invite you to visit their booths at



IMEX America, such as Celebrity Cruises in Booth #2046 who will show you how their team will help you "accomplish your business objectives while you network, build loyalty and reward your top performers."

The Celebrity Eclipse, which graces our cover this month, is a prelude to our great feature "Oceans of Incentives! The Cruise Industry Is Full Steam Ahead With New Offerings for Groups."

Why does cruising work so well for group meeting and incentive planners? Kate Guimbellot discovered many reasons when she planned a 900-qualifier incentive charter of the Norwegian Dawn as vice president of field development and training for Silpada Designs Inc. For instance, the number of options for Norwegian's onboard entertainment: "They've made sure to put in a really good blend of public spaces that allow that. So they'll have a (musical) trio playing in one area and then upstairs they'll have one of the comedy shows going on. Then they'll have a headliner in the main theater, a big production show such as the Blue Man Group. So there's always a multitude of choices for what you're going to do that night, and I know that our (sales reps) loved that." For more great reasons, please turn to page 30.

Harvey Grotsky  
Publisher

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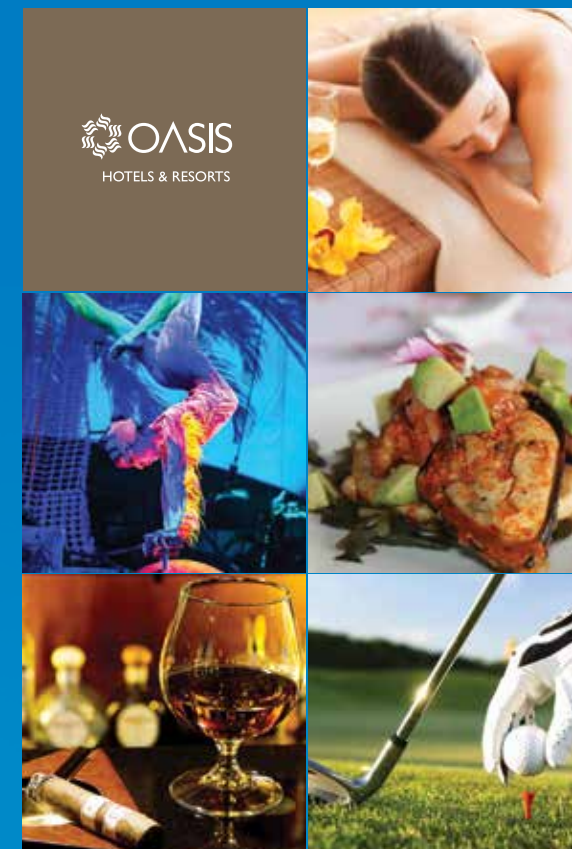
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## News & Notes

### The Broadmoor and Sea Island Properties 'Marry'



An aerial view of The Broadmoor, Colorado Springs.

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO — Sea Island Company recently announced that the ownership of the company is being consolidated under the Anschutz family, one of its four current owners, and brings together Sea Island [Georgia] and The Broadmoor [Colorado].

Sea Island, founded in 1928, is the only resort in the world to have received four Forbes Five Star awards for eight consecutive years, and The Broadmoor, founded in 1918, is the longest consecutive recipient of a Forbes Five Star award in the world. According to Scott Steilen, president of Sea Island, "The complementary nature of our two resorts and, more importantly, the cultural similarities, will create an opportunity to enhance the guest experience at each of our destinations. I have long admired The Broadmoor's operation and look forward to working together to elevate the broad array of offerings we each provide."

Steve Bartolin, chairman of The Broadmoor, added, "Rarely does an opportunity come along that creates a marriage of two unique Five Star resort destinations with such a wide range of offerings and experiences. From a world-class golf performance center and horseback riding on the beach at Sea Island to zip lining and fly fishing on private waters at The Broadmoor, and accommodations ranging from the warmth of an old English manor at The Lodge to a view of the mountains and valleys atop Cloud Camp, the offerings at these two resort properties are remarkable. While the diversity of the ocean and the mountains creates uniquely different guest experiences, what truly bonds these two legendary resorts together is the unwavering commitment to world-class service and facilities."

Sea Island, which includes The Cloister, The Lodge, Cottages and The Inn at Sea Island recently opened a new 5,000-sf ballroom and 63 rooms at The Cloister, which provides enhanced flexibility for meetings, conferences, executive retreats, and further positions the resort as an unparalleled choice for group and leisure travelers. [www.broadmoor.com](http://www.broadmoor.com), [www.seaisland.com](http://www.seaisland.com)

### Carnival to Build Its Largest Ships Ever

MIAMI, FL — As part of a new multi-ship order announced by Carnival Corporation & plc, Carnival Cruise Line is scheduled to take delivery of two new 180,000 gross-registered-ton cruise ships in 2020 and 2022, which will be the largest in the fleet. Both ships will be powered by liquefied natural gas under Carnival Corp.'s exclusive "green cruising" design and will mark the first time an LNG-powered cruise ship is based in North America.

The two ships, with an approximate passenger capacity of 5,200 based on double occupancy, are being constructed by Finnish shipbuilder Meyer Turku at the company's Turku, Finland shipyard.

"This new ship order signifies an extraordinarily exciting future for Carnival Cruise Line and the opportunities that lie ahead to introduce a variety of magnificent new features and innovations to further enhance our outstanding guest experience," said Christine Duffy, president of Carnival Cruise



DUFFY

Line. "We are also thrilled to be introducing Carnival Corporation's 'green cruising' design platform to North America. Both of these ships will be fully powered at sea and in port by liquefied natural gas, which is the world's cleanest burning fossil fuel. These ships are being designed for maximum energy efficiency and environmental friendliness," Duffy said.

Carnival Cruise Line presently operates a fleet of 25 ships. In addition to the two new ships, the 133,500-ton Carnival Horizon is under construction in Italy and set to debut in 2018. [www.carnival.com](http://www.carnival.com)

### The Trump International Hotel, Washington, DC Opens



A rendering of the Presidential Suite.

WASHINGTON, DC — The interior design of the Presidential Suite at Trump International Hotel, Washington, DC, which recently opened, was unveiled in advance of the hotel's grand opening that will take place in late October. One of 35 suites at the 263-room ultra-luxury hotel, the 4,000-sf, three-bedroom suite is located in what was formerly the Postmaster General's office and features 16-foot ceilings and soaring windows. Impressive craftsmanship and restored details along with modern luxuries make it a unique and historic space, which guests can begin enjoying during the hotel's soft opening in September.

"Our team has worked tirelessly to restore and preserve the historical elements of the Old Post Office in transforming the building to a world-class hotel," said Ivanka Trump, executive vice president of development and acquisitions, Trump Organization. "We are especially excited about the Presidential Suite; its beauty and impeccable design coupled with the historic significance of the space within the building make it the most unique suite in the city."

In addition to the Presidential Suite, another world-class accommodation at the hotel is the 6,300-sf Trump

Townhouse, which is the largest suite in Washington, DC. This bi-level suite features a private entrance on Pennsylvania Avenue, two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a private office, work-

out room, dining room that seats up to 24 people and more. The hotel's Presidential Ballroom at 13,200 sf is the largest among luxury hotels in the city. [www.trumphotelddc.com](http://www.trumphotelddc.com)

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# News & Notes

## Global DMC Partners Focus on Standardization at Annual Peer Exchange



DMCs at the Global DMC Partners Annual Peer Exchange.

WASHINGTON, DC — Global DMC Partners, the meeting professional's one worldwide solution for global event success, hosted their annual Peer Exchange in Dallas recently and worked on the network-wide initiative to finalize a standardized Global DMC Partners (GDP) Crisis Management Template, GDP Contract and GDP Proposal for all DMC members. Forty DMC attendees spent the two-day forum teaming up to brainstorm on ways to enhance their individual DMC operations and GDP network-wide operations through standardization.

Catherine Chaulet, president of Global DMC Partners, said, "Our top goal is to ensure our clients receive a seamless experience with Global DMC Partners no matter what destination they are going to. Our DMC Partners play a critical role in guaranteeing this goal is met, so their ideas and feedback are also vital in developing a standardized GDP Contract, Proposal and Crisis Management Template."

Global DMC Partners' network has exclusive partnerships with more than 55 Destination Management Companies (DMCs) that represent more than 100 destinations around the globe. [www.globaldmcpartners.com](http://www.globaldmcpartners.com)

## First Anniversary of Resorts Casino Hotel Conference Center Highlights Renovations

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ — Resorts Casino Hotel has undergone \$100 million in renovations, including the \$35 million Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville-themed entertainment complex, the all new state-of-the-art Resorts Conference Center and, most recently, the completion of phase one of a larger \$25 million room renovation project.

The conference center is an attractively designed 12,000-sf, technologically advanced facility. It features 12 conference rooms where more than 500 meeting attendees can wirelessly connect devices simultaneously, while



Resorts Casino Hotel, Atlantic City.

sharing screens with each other as well as offsite colleagues in remote locations. Each conference room has built-in 90-inch LED 1080P monitors, and most have cinema-quality DLP projection with oversized drop-down screens. Resorts also has two theaters with seating for 300 or 1,350, and is equipped with

## MPI: Event Industry Projections Remain Solidly Positive

DALLAS, TX — The most recent edition of MPI's quarterly Meetings Outlook 2016 report indicates meeting and event industry projections remain solidly positive. Key findings:

- The past year has seen a 12 percent drop in respondents that project positive growth for upcoming live event attendance (down from 62 percent); yet, live and virtual attendance figures are still expected to grow 1.5 percent and 2.5 percent, respectively.
- Thirty percent of respondents are avoiding destinations that have laws prohibiting universal restroom use; while 19 percent are avoiding locations with liberal handgun or weapons laws.
- Sixty-three percent of respondents predict favorable business conditions for the year ahead.
- Twenty-seven percent of respondents said political elections have a significant influence on meetings and events.

To view the full report, visit [bit.ly/2aUmQgZ](http://bit.ly/2aUmQgZ). [www.mpiweb.org](http://www.mpiweb.org)

# Snapshots



Credits: 1,2 U.S. Travel Association, 3 Lisa House Photography, 4-9 Questex Travel Group

**1** The U.S. Travel Association's Educational Seminar for Tourism Organizations (ESTO), the only national forum where destination marketing professionals get critical tools, tips and information to help them better market and grow their destinations, was held recently in Boca Raton, Florida. (L to r) Will Seccombe, president and CEO of Visit Florida, joins Roger Dow, president and CEO of the U.S. Travel Association and Jorge Pesquera, CEO of Discover The Palm Beaches, at the event. **2** More colleagues joined Seccombe and Pesquera at ESTO for a photo opportunity. **3** Enthusiastic attendees in Austin, Texas, at the fourth ILEA Live, produced by the International Live Events Association, an international conference that delivers education based on the pillars of Creativity, Collaboration and Innovation. **4** An attendee entering virtual reality at the GES and Events DC booth at HSMIA Meet — held recently in Washington DC. **5, 6** Participants in the HSMIA Food Bank Showdown activity — a successful teambuilding activity and reception with the donated food helping DC Central Kitchen. **7** Attendees enjoying the 2016 CMITE (Caribbean Meeting & Incentive Travel Exchange) at the Hilton Barbados Resort included (l to r) Garland Preddy, SGMP; and Mark Harvey, Ethos; **8** Michael Kohlmaier, Melia Hotels International; Ricardo Bethel, St. Martin Tourism Board; Petra Roach and Neville Boxill, Barbados Tourism Marketing; John McMahon, Questex Travel Group; **9** Carmelita Xavier, ACE DMC/Solar Tours St. Lucia; Danielle Bellerose, Conference Direct; and Sepra Harrow, ACE DMC/Solar Tours St. Lucia.





By Laurie E. Sherwood and Sadaf A. Nejat

## Planning for Zika

In 2014, the corporate planner started planning the company's 2016 annual meeting in Miami Beach. The outside meeting planner started planning a 2017 incentive for top performing employees at a Costa Rica resort. It's now 2016, and Zika is in the news daily. Despite your extensive planning, you are faced with travel advisories, employee questions, etc. What's a planner to do?

In the midst of worldwide concerns about Zika virus infections, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently issued an unprecedented travel advisory urging pregnant women to avoid the Miami neighborhood of Wynwood where they discovered cases of locally acquired Zika virus infection — the first time the CDC has advised people not to travel to a place in the continental United States. In late August, a new cluster of five Zika virus infections around Miami Beach led the CDC to expand this travel advisory to include a section of Miami Beach.

### What Is Zika?

First identified in monkeys in Uganda in 1947, Zika was later identified in humans in 1952. The first report of locally acquired Zika in the Americas did not occur until mid-2015. Moreover, it was not until the latter half of 2015 and early 2016 that the link between Zika and serious conditions, including a neurological syndrome and congenital malformations, became known. Currently, more than 50 countries have reported active Zika virus transmission, and other potential complications of Zika virus disease are the subject of intense research efforts.

Zika is a virus transmitted primarily through bites of infected *Aedes* mosquitos. These mosquitos can become infected when they bite an infected person and then transmit the Zika virus when they subsequently bite someone. The Zika virus also can be spread from a pregnant woman to her fetus, through sexual contact and most likely blood transfusions. Many people infected with the Zika virus will not have any symptoms or only mild symptoms, the most common of which include fever, rash, joint pain, and/or conjunctivitis (pinkeye). Other symptoms include muscle pain and headache. Symptoms can last several days to a week and resolve without medical attention. In some populations, however, Zika presents serious risks. Zika infection during pregnancy can cause microcephaly and other severe fetal brain defects. Other problems detected among fetuses and infants in-

fectured with the Zika virus before birth include eye defects, hearing deficits and impaired growth. In Zika-affected areas, there have been increased reports of Guillain-Barré syndrome, an otherwise rare disorder that can cause paralysis. There is currently no vaccine for the Zika virus, although the race is on to find one.

### What Is the Duty of Care?

In light of the potentially severe risk, especially for certain populations, and the number of countries affected, travel providers are taking various steps to protect themselves from the potential impact of the virus, including offering credits, refunds and trip alternatives as travelers begin to rethink travel to affected areas. Additionally, travel providers generally owe a duty of care to travelers to disclose information that is material to the services provided. The scope of this duty to disclose is limited to what is reasonable in any given instance. Accordingly, for outside meeting planners with upcoming meetings in Zika-affected locales, it would be advisable to direct meeting participants to the CDC's website and recommend they consult with a medical professional before traveling. This enables meeting participants to make informed health decisions and decide whether to proceed with their trip. Depending on the target population, as well as timing of the event, planners may want to consider alternative locations and work closely with their travel providers.

In-house corporate travel/meeting planners face additional concerns in light of the statutory safeguards of the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 (Act). The Act covers most private sector employers and their workers, and some public sector employers and workers. Its objective, via the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), is to assure safe and healthful working conditions for workers. In keeping with this objective in light of Zika, OSHA, in concert with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), issued a fact sheet entitled "Interim Guidance for Protecting Workers From Occupational Exposure to Zika Virus." This fact sheet outlines steps employers and employees should take to protect themselves from Zika. While this fact sheet focuses on traditional occupational exposures such as outdoor workers, health care and laboratory workers, and mosquito control workers, as opposed to exposures resulting from work-related travel to affected areas, it provides helpful guidance. Specifically, the fact sheet recommends

following the precautions listed in the fact sheet for employees who may be traveling to affected areas.

First and foremost, the CDC/NIOSH fact sheets recommend that employers keep employees informed of risks associated with Zika. The CDC website contains up-to-date Zika travel information by region, and is helpful for employers and employ-

certain active ingredients, wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants, and taking steps to control mosquitoes, including using air conditioning where available and/or sleeping under a mosquito net bed. Employers who have employees traveling to Zika-affected areas should consider providing the necessary repellents and other items as possible.

**“Travel providers generally owe a duty of care to travelers to disclose information that is material to the services provided.”**

ees. Keeping employees informed of the risks associated with Zika may result in giving employees the option to decline travel to Zika-affected areas. To avoid potential legal action, employers must maintain employees' privacy and confidentiality when considering requests not to travel. For example, employers cannot inquire about employees' plans for pregnancy. Further, in implementing practices to address Zika, employers should avoid discriminatory or retaliatory conduct. For example, banning women from traveling to Zika-affected areas or keeping an employee from participating in an activity in a Zika-affected area, if such participation is possible by alternative means, may be actionable.

### What Precautions Can We Take?

As for precautions when traveling to Zika-affected areas, the CDC recommends use of EPA-registered insect repellents with

If an employee becomes infected, the employee should be urged to seek prompt and appropriate medical evaluation. In terms of infected employees' legal recourse against an employer, most employees will be limited to state workers' compensation benefits. However, where there is negligence on the employer's part or there are discriminatory or retaliatory practices in play, an employee's potential remedies may extend beyond workers' compensation benefits.

Until the reach of Zika is better defined and its impact better understood, employers' safest course of action is to keep employees informed, take employee concerns seriously and institute procedures for considering them, and consider giving employees the option to avoid Zika-affected areas.

*The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and is not intended to provide legal advice for a specific situation or to create an attorney-client relationship.* **C&IT**



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By Milko Figueroa

## Meeting Your Outdoor Event's Wi-Fi Requirements

In the fall 2015 Meetings Outlook Survey, Meeting Professionals International cited "Disruption caused by technology innovation as a category of concern" by 31 percent of its survey respondents. Among the top-of-mind concerns for meeting planners are Wi-Fi demands. While Wi-Fi demands are a concern for both indoor and outdoor events, the challenges for the latter or for events that combine both indoor and outdoor venues are greater. Assuring that an event's Wi-Fi will reliably meet the needs of your outdoor event attendees is critical and will help avoid one of the most frequently reported causes of attendee frustration — inadequate and unreliable Wi-Fi.

### Outdoor Event Wi-Fi 101

There are some basic tenets to follow regarding Wi-Fi solutions for outdoor events which every meeting planner should understand. They are as follows:

- One size does not fit all. Unlike an indoor event that may rely, at least in part, on existing Wi-Fi infrastructure, an outdoor event has no infrastructure, power or hard-line internet and must often cover a large open space.

- In addition to lacking Wi-Fi infrastructure, many outdoor events also are challenged by a lack of physical structures to house Wi-Fi equipment.
  - You must allow for the potential of unseasonable or inclement weather.
  - Wi-Fi can be costly, especially if there is no strategy in place to offset costs.
  - Event attendees depend on their mobile technology. Indoors or outdoors, expect mobile devices to be used for communication, information sharing and networking.
- Keeping these factors in mind, there are measures to take to assure that an outdoor event will have reliable, simultaneous and uninterrupted long-range Wi-Fi coverage accessible to every attendee.

### The Route to Ample, Secure Wi-Fi

Meeting planners will have multiple Wi-Fi infrastructure options to consider when establishing their outdoor Wi-Fi solution. Included among them are the bandwidth needed (i.e., cellular, satellite and microwave communications), and the wireless Internet Service Provider that can be used (e.g., AT&T, Verizon for cellular, HughesNet for satellite and Towerstream for microwave).

Planners also should consider options relating to signal distribution with choices such as wireless hotspot service with captive portals such as Peplink, wireless routers, enterprise routers and access points.

The decisions made will depend on various considerations. For example, if an event planner is trying to provide Wi-Fi for up to 80 devices in a coverage area of up to 2,000 sf, and offer shared bandwidth with variable speeds, the Peplink hotspot service would be a viable, low-cost option for cellular. The downside could be bandwidth speeds and data capability.

For a Wi-Fi solution that will ac-



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# Perspective

commodate up to 120 devices in a coverage area of more than 2,000 sf, with dedicated bandwidth, a satellite option would be more appropriate. Here, the dedicated bandwidth and more consistent performance are pluses, but on the negative side, there is limited bandwidth and data capability.

For outdoor events demanding Wi-Fi service for hundreds to thousands of devices, a microwave option is warranted. It affords a customizable coverage area, dedicated bandwidth and a scalable solution with robust performance. It does, however, incur higher costs and a longer lead time for design and setup.

Ideally, all meeting planners will want to be able to address

staff on another); monitor how bandwidth is being used, by whom and in what locations; allocate bandwidth accordingly; and even cut off bandwidth to individuals who are abusing the service by consuming too much bandwidth.

### Effective Outdoor Wi-Fi Solution at Work

When a global athletic footwear and apparel manufacturer held its multiday, national athletic competition, the company required a stable, secure Wi-Fi solution to cover a 75-acre outdoor venue and accommodate the Wi-Fi needs of more than 100 vendors, the competing athletes, production staff and live internet

“Meeting planners will have multiple **Wi-Fi infrastructure options** to consider when establishing their outdoor Wi-Fi solution.”

all of the common challenges when large numbers of people gather for an outdoor event. These range from weak signals and cellular network capacity issues to increased demand for bandwidth to support various user activities on multiple type devices and security breaches wherein unintended users are sharing bandwidth from the event's Wi-Fi. The answer lies with the right technology, accessible via easy and cost-effective rental options, which are deployed by experienced, knowledgeable Wi-Fi solution specialists.

### Building a Sound Wi-Fi Solution

To provide reliable, ample Wi-Fi service to attendees who are likely to be roving across the grounds of an outdoor event, but still expecting fast, seamless connections, a long-range Wi-Fi array and routers should be considered. The array, which can be deployed using a secure private network with multiple routers, can provide excellent coverage. The array enables the meeting planner to control who is on each private network (e.g., exhibitors on one network, attendees on another, meeting planner

broadcast coverage. The bandwidth sources needed were both microwave and fiber. The Wi-Fi solution provided had to address challenges typical in an outdoor venue, including no power or internet infrastructure in the vendor's area or the athletes' tent, as well as no physical structures to hold the Wi-Fi equipment. Unseasonable weather was another challenge. The event also required that an onsite command center be established so that the Wi-Fi engineers could continually monitor the system's performance in real-time. A Wi-Fi network with five dedicated sub-networks for the vendor area, athletes' tent, production staff, media and a backup line was established. Wi-Fi analytics were provided to facilitate realtime tracking of bandwidth usage and flexible bandwidth distribution. To help offset Wi-Fi costs for the event sponsor, strategies including creating a captive portal opportunity, vendor booth add-on premium and using vouchers to help limit distribution and control Wi-Fi usage were applied. As a result of this effective Wi-Fi solution, this large-scale, globally watched outdoor sporting event was an all-around winner and absent of Wi-Fi inadequacies.

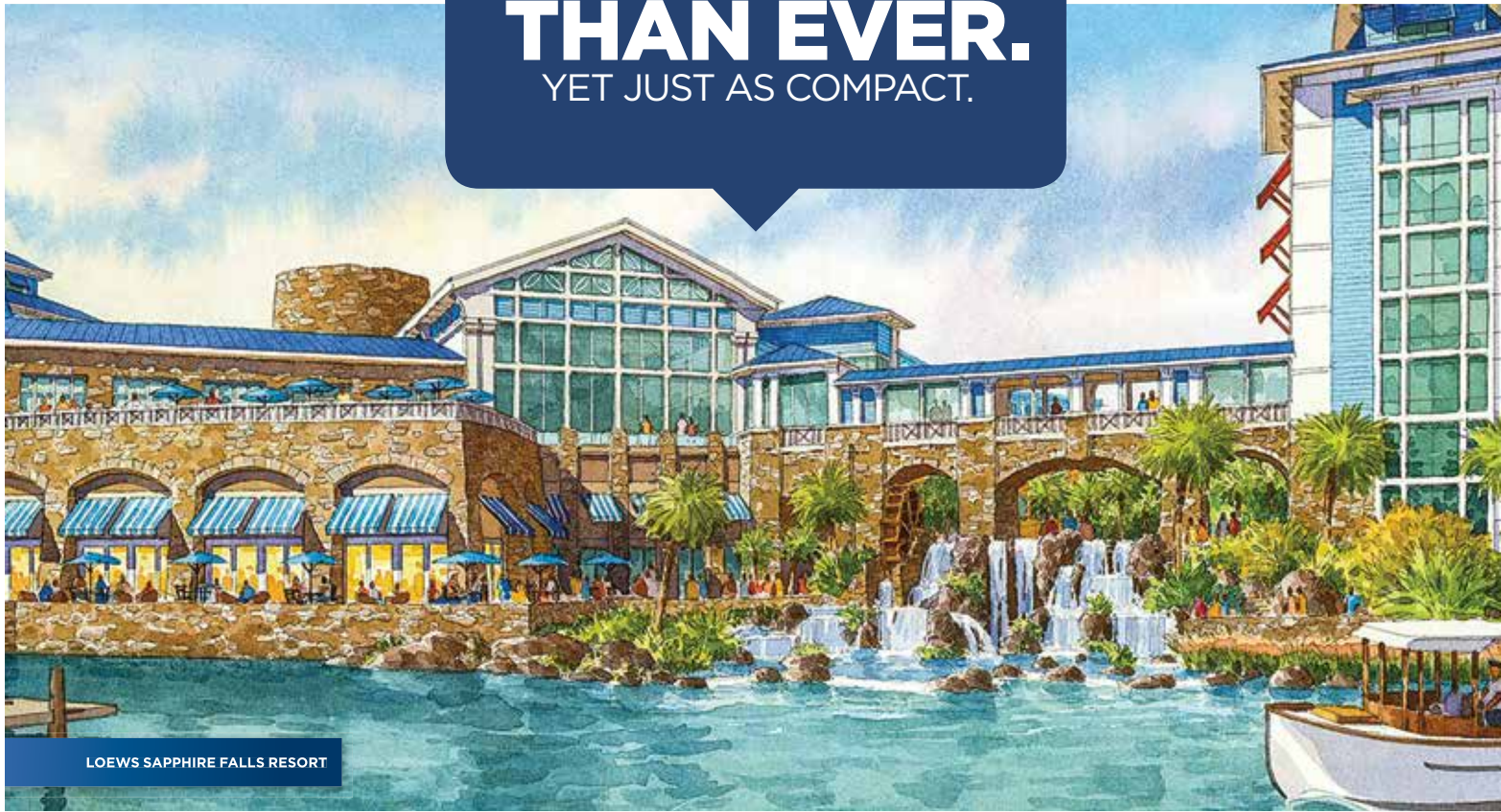
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# The Talk of the Town

## A Whole World of Business, Education and Networking in Just Three Days in October

America's worldwide exhibition for incentive travel, meetings and events—IMEX America—will take place October 18–20 at the Sands Expo and Convention Center at The Venetian/The Palazzo. Smart Monday, powered by MPI, will precede the event on October 17.

This year's show is set to deliver a strong business environment, top-notch education and a powerful lineup of networking events. Two key themes are explored throughout the show: the Sharing Economy and Where Personal Meets Professional, which focuses on how personal development and well-being can benefit the individual both in and out of the office.

Meeting industry professionals will discover the latest trends and developments in destinations, venues and technology from around the world as well as the latest innovations that will impact the way they do business. Many of these innovations will come from the technology sector.

A survey of nearly 1,200 respondents by the IMEX Group revealed that 40 percent of hosted buyers, 34.5 percent of visitors and 37.5 percent of exhibitors thought technology would deliver the next big innovation. New apps, virtual meetings and meeting room technology are examples of how innovative



Jubilation reigns at IMEX America 2015 in Las Vegas.

Credit: IMEX America

event technology is making an impact across the industry.

### #IMEXpitch

Meeting professionals can preview some of the technology set to make waves in the industry at the #IMEXpitch on October 18. #IMEXpitch will showcase five finalists competing in a live head-to-head pitch competition.

Each company has five minutes to introduce its product, including the concept, features and unique selling points, to a live audience. The winner, chosen by an expert judging panel, will receive a free space on the Technology Pavilion at the 2017 show in addition to press and marketing exposure.

The independent judging panel made up of event technology experts are always looking out for the latest developments. One of the judges Tara Thomas, cofounder of The Meeting Pool, explains: "IMEX has a long history of being at the forefront of showcasing event tech. The competition is truly where the industry looks for the latest innovations changing the game for event professionals and is

also an amazing opportunity for startups to attract significant attention and buzz around their products."

The TECHknowledge Area at IMEX America is where experts will deliver targeted technology sessions; TECHbytes is set up to answer questions on hot topics such as Snapchat, Slack, OneNote and wearable technology; and the Gadget Lab will guide visitors through the latest tech.

Buyers at IMEX America also can meet the experts behind the latest innovations in a series of TechTours running throughout the show.

### Association Focus Program Reimagined

IMEX America has completely reimagined the 2016 program and format of Association Focus based on extensive meetings industry research and feedback gleaned from IMEX attendees.

As a result, Association Focus 2016 has been designed as an entirely new learning experience for the participating association professionals.

The concurrent afternoon sessions and roundtable discussions have been

replaced by two independent learning streams, each chaired and directed by a senior association executive.

John H. Graham, IV, FASAE, CAE, CEO and president of ASAE, chairs the new Leadership Stream, which is set to tackle the long-term strategic issues currently dominating the minds and plans of the association C-suite. Topics include the impact of strategic governance on profitability and planning, how to ready a membership organization for a possible cyber attack, and how to engage with a generationally and geographically diverse membership base.

Graham says he is very pleased to be involved with IMEX's Association Focus this year. "Providing high-level learning as well as peer-to-peer knowledge sharing for meeting professionals at the C-suite level is critical for the continued success of our industry," he says. "The track I'm chairing highlights the challenges and opportunities our industry is facing. It's vital for association meeting leaders to participate in this highly customized, powerful day."

Martin Sirk, CEO of the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA), will lead the new Association Meetings and Events stream, where the spotlight falls on the tactical and managerial challenges facing association meeting and event planners. This stream will explore the power of building strong relationships with CVBs, how to negotiate hotel contracts for maximum value, and the very latest approaches on how to leverage sponsorships.

"Associations face more challenges yet more opportunities than ever before in a global meetings marketplace," says Sirk. "IMEX's Association Focus is a first-rate learning day where association meeting professionals can really dig in together and look to innovate and adopt best practices. I'm very happy to be a part of it and to be leading a track."

Carina Bauer, CEO of the IMEX Group, says, "We've taken an entirely fresh approach and invested strongly in this year's program. We knew the content needed to evolve to truly satisfy the unique education and networking needs of a diverse set of association meeting experts. For the C-suite, we want to reward their in-

## Smart Monday Powered by MPI

The schedule of Education and Events at IMEX America on October 17, 2016.

**7:00 am - 8:00 am** • Meditation  
**8:00 am - 12:30 pm** • Certified Incentive Specialist certification program • SITE CIS  
**8:00 am - 5:00 pm** • IAAE CEM Learning Program: Facilities and Site Selection  
**8:30 am - 9:30 am** • Keynote: Meetology: The fascinating science powering interpersonal communication • The Meetology Lab  
**9:00 am - 6:00 pm** • The best of meeting design in a day • Meeting Design Institute  
**10:00 am - 11:00 am** • SITE Index: the incentive travel industry annual forecast  
**10:00 am - 10:30 am** • Brainstorm area: food and beverage trends • MPI  
**10:00 am - 11:00 am** • Improved communications = better buying processes • GBTA  
**10:00 am - 11:00 am** • Deep Dive Part 1: How increased situational awareness and improved guest experience improves event security • IAVM  
**10:00 am - 11:00 am** • Improve results with strategic communication skills • MPI  
**10:00 am - 11:00 am** • MeetingCentric tour: back of the house lessons Venetian Palazzo Sands Expo  
**10:00 am - 11:00 am** • Five simple steps to win big in the conference market • Conference Converter  
**10:00 am - 11:00 am** • How to implement event technology at your meeting • Stiletto Empire  
**10:00 am - 10:45 am** • Why is innovative thinking so hard—and what to do about it!  
**10:00 am - 10:45 am** • Exploiting video lounges  
**11:00 am - 11:30 am** • Flip your breakout session  
**11:00 am - 11:30 am** • Face the camera  
**11:15 am - 12:15 pm** • Beyond congress management • IAPCO  
**11:15 am - 12:15 pm** • The five parts of an effective post-show plan • When I Need Help (WINH)  
**11:15 am - 12:15 pm** • 5 key strategies to prevent the decline of your room block • DMAI  
**11:15 am - 12:15 pm** • Deep Dive Part 2: How increased situational awareness and improved guest experience improves event security • IAVM  
**11:15 am - 12:15 pm** • Crafting a powerful 90-second story • MPI  
**11:15 am - 12:15 pm** • Meetings outlook: deep dive into the industry's business trends • MPI  
**11:15 am - 12:15 pm** • Connections matter: how to maximize industry networking opportunities • LPE, LLC  
**11:15 am - 12:15 pm** • MeetingCentric tour: back of the house lessons • Venetian Palazzo Sands Expo  
**11:15 am - 11:45 am** • Brainstorm area: women in leadership • MPI  
**11:45 am - 12:15 pm** • On-demand creative thinking (tool #1)  
**11:45 am - 12:15 pm** • Gamification is serious business  
**12:30 pm - 1:00 pm** • The innovation killer—the curse of knowledge  
**12:30 pm - 1:00 pm** • Meetings are not a spectator sport

**1:00 pm - 5:00 pm** • The MPI Academy: Healthcare Meeting Compliance Certificate (HMCC)  
**1:15 pm - 1:45 pm** • Menu match up  
**1:15 pm - 1:45 pm** • Interaction for millennials  
**1:30 pm - 5:00 pm** • PCMA Business School: make your ideas stick with persuasive presentation skills  
**1:45 pm - 3:00 pm** • Wi-Fi 101 comprehension and negotiation tools • MPI  
**1:45 pm - 3:00 pm** • What's your competitive edge? The three steps to a personal brand that creates career stability • HOLLAI Productions, LLC  
**1:45 pm - 3:00 pm** • Senior meeting executive group therapy • Maritz  
**1:45 pm - 3:00 pm** • Hotel contracts boot camp for experienced planners • Foster, Jensen & Guley, LLC  
**1:45 pm - 3:00 pm** • Mastering medical meetings: strategies on capturing and operating health care meetings • Bonduant Consulting  
**1:45 pm - 2:45 pm** • MeetingCentric tour: back of the house lessons • Venetian Palazzo Sands Expo  
**1:45 pm - 3:00 pm** • Brands taking action. What's next for progressive destinations and suppliers? • MCI Group  
**1:45 pm - 3:00 pm** • What's keeping hospitality and meeting planners up at night and how does that impact both businesses? • HSMAI  
**1:45 pm - 3:00 pm** • Powerful proposals that planners love. How to write proposals that win! • Conference Converter  
**1:45 pm - 2:15 pm** • Brainstorm area: mentorships • MPI  
**2:00 pm - 2:30 pm** • Are you solving the wrong problem?  
**2:00 pm - 2:30 pm** • Introverts vs extroverts  
**2:45 pm - 3:15 pm** • No more eye rolling  
**2:45 pm - 3:15 pm** • Chair yoga and other mindfulness techniques  
**3:30 pm - 5:00 pm** • Traffic drivers: trends and engagement • GES Global Experience Specialists  
**3:30 pm - 5:00 pm** • The art of networking and selling at trade shows • Ovation Global DMC • MCI Group  
**3:30 pm - 5:00 pm** • Deep Dive: Negotiating contentious hotel contract clauses • Foster, Jensen & Guley, LLC  
**3:30 pm - 5:00 pm** • Easy ways to get started in sustainable events • GMIC  
**3:30 pm - 5:00 pm** • Why the meetings industry should care about the sharing economy • IMEX  
**3:30 pm - 4:00 pm** • Brainstorm area: cool technologies • MPI  
**3:30 pm - 5:00 pm** • Leveraging the power of our social brains to design amazing events • Insight Event Strategy and Madison College  
**3:30 pm - 4:00 pm** • Insider secrets of Instagram views  
**3:30 pm - 4:00 pm** • On-demand creative thinking (tool #2)  
**3:30 pm - 5:00 pm** • Maximize your promotional power with photos • Orange Photography  
**4:15 pm - 5:00 pm** • It's always the little things  
**4:15 pm - 5:00 pm** • Challengers' choice  
**5:00 pm - 6:00 pm** • AHA hour!



vestment of time with level-appropriate learning and connections. For professionals and planners, we want them to feel we're fighting in their corner...helping them stay ahead of the game, both personally and professionally. Last year one delegate described Association Focus as 'worth its weight in gold.' That set the bar high, but we're determined to reach beyond it this year," said Bauer.

Association Focus takes place on the afternoon of Smart Monday on October 17. The program will include a networking lunch, networking breaks and a wrap-up Association Evening cocktail reception.

### Preparing for the Future

Harnessing the moment and preparing for the future are themes running throughout the comprehensive education program at IMEX America this year.

How to communicate and develop a personal brand that delivers immediate impact as well as how to anticipate and prepare for the future are challenges facing many industry professionals both in and out of the office.

Education sessions have been tailored to help meet those challenges. The theme — where personal meets professional — explores various elements of self-development. For example, the importance of a personal brand and its power to expand networks is covered in one of the Smart Monday education sessions by sales and marketing expert Jodi Holler, who believes that one's personal brand is the best job security on the planet.

In addition, using the power of positivity and laughter to build a personal brand will be explored by MPI keynote and self-confessed perpetual optimist Tami Evans, who will encourage delegates to "put perfection on pause" in favor of personality and passion in her keynote address on October 20 entitled "Half Full of it: Activating Optimism and Other Hardcore Soft Skills."

When it comes to interacting with others, first impressions count, and in the Meetology guide to connecting with others in an instant, Jon Bradshaw will share the important ingredient needed for connectivity as well as tips on body language and perception. His MPI keynote on Oc-

tober 17 delves into the science behind our ability to connect, interact and communicate effectively in "Meetology: The Fascinating Science Powering Interpersonal Communication."

In his MPI keynote "Disrupt You! Strategies for Billion-Dollar Success in This Era of Endless Innovation" on October 18, serial entrepreneur and digital guru Jay Samit shows how the forward-looking strategies that help the world's fastest growing companies flourish can be applied at an individual level. His later Q&A explores how recognizing disruption and anticipating change can positively impact meetings and events.

The future of business, attendance and budgets will be previewed on October 17 by Jessie States, CMM, manager of professional development at Meeting Professionals International, based on MPI's recent research in "Meetings Outlook: Deep Dive Into the Industry's Business Trends."

Yma Sherry, vice president of American Express Meetings & Events, North America, also looks to the future on October 18, exploring the trends likely to impact next year in "Be Proactive to 2017 — Meetings Trends!"

These are some of the hundreds of education sessions (see page 17 for *Smart Monday lineup*) at IMEX America, enabling meeting professionals to gain from the best minds in the business and profit from up-to-the-minute trends and technologies from the experts. MPI will present daily keynote speakers each morning during IMEX America, and all show floor education takes place at the Inspiration Hub, sponsored by Maritz Global Events.

### Well-Being Is a High Priority

With the benefits of healthy habits in and out of the office increasingly recognized, a survey by IMEX confirms that well-being remains a high priority for many meeting professionals. More than three-quarters of a survey of nearly 1,200 respondents confirmed the importance of well-being during business travel: 79.5 percent of hosted buyers, 78 percent of visitors and 83 percent of exhibitors all stated that this was important to them.

A series of well-being initiatives will be available for meeting profession-

als at IMEX America this year to ensure they recharge and make the most of their busy days.

At the popular IMEXrun, participants can start their day on the right foot with a 5km route along The Strip as dawn breaks over Las Vegas. Developed by sports by tlc and inspired by Rio, the IMEXrun takes place on October 19.

Following its launch last year, the Be Well Lounge returns, sponsored by Hilton Worldwide. Mindfulness trainer Lee Papa and her expert team believe "business and mindfulness go hand in hand" and will offer regular sessions on yoga, mindfulness and meditation. Well-being education sessions on the show floor include "Why You Should Include Wellness in Your Conferences" by Kim Bercovitz, Ph.D., and "The Road Warrior: Staying Healthy on the Road, Detailing Ways to Fit Healthy Eating and Fitness Into Busy Travel Schedules."

Delegates at IMEX America can enjoy some "netwalking" and engage with the local community by taking part in Garbage Grabbers-Clean Up in Las Vegas, a new hands-on community program for the 2016 show.

Volunteers can join IMEX staff and the Outside Las Vegas Foundation to help clean up the city's walking trails and parks. Part of IMEX's overall commitment to CSR and legacy programs, sponsored by Costa Rica Tourism Board and supported by AlliedPRA, Exclusive Destinations with 3D Destinations, GES and MeetGreen, the event will take place on Smart Monday, October 17, and will be a great way to give back and "netwalk" through the city's green spaces with other meeting professionals.

Bauer says, "It's widely recognized that physical activity contributes to well-being in both our business and personal lives, and many meeting professionals are keen to maintain healthy habits despite packed schedules. Our wide range of well-being initiatives will help them do this by enabling attendees to energize and recharge so they're in top form to make the most of and enjoy their time at IMEX America."

For more information, see the profiles on the following pages and go to [www.imexamerica.com](http://www.imexamerica.com). **C&IT**

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PREVIEW 2016

## Monterey County Convention & Visitors Bureau

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modate up to 3,200 attendees, and adjacent hotels boast even more meeting options. Easily accessible, Monterey County offers 250 lodging properties with more than 12,000 rooms. Groups will find legendary golf courses, art galleries, numerous vineyards and tasting rooms, 10 major museums and a wide array of attractions. There are endless opportunities in Monterey to experience inspired moments in meetings! **C&IT**



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Historic Boardwalk Hall, home of the Miss America Pageant, played host to the city's growing convention industry and has hosted an amazing list of dazzling entertainers and knockout sporting events throughout its 85-year history. Atlantic City guarantees fast-paced excitement and non-stop year-round activities. **C&IT**

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Puerto Rico is already known as a sophisticated meeting destination, and with the recent surge of new luxury property offerings, Puerto Rico is fast becoming one of the most sought-after destinations for incentive travel and high-end corporate gatherings.

State-of-the-art meeting facilities such as the Puerto Rico Convention Center Pedro Rosselló and a culinary scene that includes celebrity chefs and brave culinary twists on local favorite fare are just part of the appeal for groups. Add to that activities such as zip lining through a rainforest tree canopy, kayaking in one of the world's only bio-luminescent bays, strolling through the living history of Old San Juan, or even a rum-tasting tour of the Bacardi Rum Factory, and it's clear that Puerto Rico offers groups experiences, accommodations and amenities unlike any other meeting destination in the world.

Incentive planners looking to incorporate Puerto Rico's history can choose from the feel of a formal outdoor reception at Casa Blanca garden (once the home of

Puerto Rico's first governor and explorer, Juan Ponce de León), or use the expansive courtyard of Ballajá, which once served as an army barracks for Spanish soldiers and can accommodate 1,500 guests for a reception. The Jíbaro party provides native music, dance and food of Puerto Rico in a carnival-like atmosphere, complete with a strolling band and dancing "vejigantes."

Several of the island's traditional haciendas, or plantation homes, also serve as outstanding venues for group functions. At Hacienda Don Carmelo, groups can enjoy a private outdoor pig roast at this renowned equestrian center where the island's famed Paso Fino horses and riders demonstrate their talents.

As the "Culinary Capital of the Caribbean," Puerto Rico's restaurants also offer distinctive experiences. Many top restaurants offer a chef's table dining experience, while group cooking demonstrations and hands-on culinary experiences can be enjoyed by larger groups. **C&IT**

**IMEX BOOTH #749**

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Carnival Imagination's WaterWorks (here and ship inset) and entertainment on Carnival Vista.

# Oceans of Incentives!

## The Cruise Industry Is Full Steam Ahead With New Offerings for Groups

By Patrick Simms

Cruising continues to reward groups on a multitude of levels, from creative shore excursions in a variety of destinations to expanding onboard entertainment to

ever-improving cuisine. Even the cabins themselves, particularly those with panoramic oceanic views, can inspire attendees and motivate them in the workplace as potential incentive qualifiers.

That's what Kate Guimbellot discov-

ered when she planned a 900-qualifier incentive charter of the Norwegian Dawn as vice president of field development and training for the direct jewelry sales company Silpada Designs Inc.

The company's representatives strove

not only to qualify for the cruise, but also to qualify sooner rather than later, as that would guarantee them a better cabin. "We had to figure out how to divvy up the cabins because there are so many different categories. And so we did

it on a first come, first serve basis," Guimbellot explains. "So for the first time ever, it wasn't just about achieving (the sales quota) in that 12-month period, it was about achieving it as fast as possible, because the first person to achieve it

got a penthouse suite, then the balcony cabins, and it went down from there. It was actually a very healthy competition and drove my sales very well because they frontloaded everything to hit their numbers sooner."



## Building Awareness

Despite the potential for such robust ROI, the cruise meeting industry as a whole still has to persuade many planners as to its value proposition. "Although it is picking up momentum, we feel that cruising really is underutilized" among meeting groups, says Lisa Vogt, associate vice president, corporate meetings, incentives and charter sales with Celebrity Cruises. "So I think from a cruise industry perspective we all need to band together and build awareness of cruising as an amazing venue for meeting and incentive groups."

Celebrity, she says, has been hosting not only incentives, but also annual con-

*Attendees "can have discussions in an intimate setting, cocktail bar or out on the deck. It gives them the opportunity to foster communication."*

**Peggy Cunningham**  
Executive Vice President  
Afflink Business Services  
Tuscaloosa, AL

ferences and product launches. "Cruising creates such a fantastic backdrop for any one of those types of events," Vogt adds.

Indeed, a cruise is not just a backdrop for diversion that rewards performance, but also for networking. As Peggy Cunningham, executive vice president of Afflink Business Services, a division of Afflink LLC, observes, attendees "can have discussions in an intimate setting, cocktail bar or out on the deck. It gives them the opportunity to foster communication and share best practices in a casual environment. We have that same opportunity at the ground events, except it's just in the organized evening events or excursions."

Afflink, which manages all incentive and meeting programs internally for Af-



Silpada Designs incentive program qualifiers show their enthusiasm at the Sailaway party during an incentive charter of the Norwegian Dawn.

flink as well as for outside companies, partners with Silversea for its New Latitudes incentive program. For more than 12 years, New Latitudes has taken qualifiers to destinations as diverse as Italy and the Windward Islands. Next spring, the group will sail to Greece. The Windward Islands are part of what remains the most popular cruise destination in the world, the Caribbean, while Italy and Greece are part of the also-popular Mediterranean. But continually motivating potential qualifiers requires a variety of experiences, and a very different kind of milieu is found in Alaska. "We're seeing an uptick in our Alaska business," says Vogt. "I think that's because it's a beautiful destination and people are looking for new experiences." Along those lines, Celebrity is growing its offerings in the exotic Galapagos Islands, where the company now offers the 48-capacity Xperience and 16-capacity Xploration to complement its 100-capacity Xpedition.

## Cities at Sea

Along with variety in destinations, the

cruise industry continues to diversify its onboard entertainment, with the most prominent examples coming from the megaships. "The ships that have come out in the last four to five years are a new generation in a lot of ways because they take into account so much more of the onboard experience," observes Mark Faldmo, CTC, president, Columbus Travel. "Sometimes I think you could take some of these ships, particularly Royal Caribbean's new megaships, and go 50 miles offshore, drop anchor for a week and have a great vacation," he observes. "They are like cities at sea."

And those "cities" are growing. Royal Caribbean's 3,835-capacity Adventure of the Seas, for example, will debut numerous recreational amenities this November, including new dual racer waterslides, Cyclone and Typhoon, the popular FlowRider surf simulator, and a children's aquapark, Splashaway Bay. In addition, a new lineup of culinary and entertainment venues will be introduced, including Izumi Japanese Cuisine, Chops Grille and Boleros Latin Lounge.

Celebrity, meanwhile, recently launched an initiative called "18 shows in 18 months." "We've revamped 18 of our production shows across our fleet, and it's really modernizing our entertainment with rich visuals and a lot of flying and acrobatics," says Vogt. Recreational opportunities aboard Celebrity ships also can have a teambuilding value, such as bocce ball on its Solstice class ships at the



The dramatic aqua theater on Royal Caribbean's Harmony.

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***“Sometimes I think you could take some of these ships, particularly Royal Caribbean’s new megaships, and go 50 miles offshore, drop anchor for a week and have a great vacation. They are like cities at sea.”***



**Mark Faldmo, CTC, President  
Columbus Travel, Bountiful, UT**

Lawn Club, pool volleyball and casino game tournaments.

Regarding Norwegian’s onboard entertainment, “there are just so many options,” says Guimbellot. “They’ve made sure to put in a really good blend of public spaces that allow that. So they’ll have a (musical) trio playing in one area and then upstairs they’ll have one of the comedy shows going on. Then they’ll have a headliner in the main theater, a big production show such as the Blue Man Group. So there’s always a multitude of choices for what you’re going to do that night, and I know that our (sales reps) loved that.”

In addition, Guimbellot found the Norwegian Dawn staff to be very flexible in accommodating her entertainment goals for the incentive program, including a “white party” for Sterling Soar, a group of about 400 upper-echelon achievers. “We totally converted the club on the top of the ship and brought in an onshore production company,” she relates. “The vessel really worked with us to bring all that scenery on, the lasers and special effects. And for our farewell event we took over the entire central atrium, which is very tall, and brought in these massive lit balls, hanging them everywhere. I also brought in a famous DJ from South Beach and she cruised with us the entire time.”

Per Guimbellot’s request, Norwegian also brought in people she personally knew in order to fill the positions of hotel director, cabaret artist, stager and choreographer. “I didn’t think that (request) was going to fly, but it did. And to me that just indicated that the sales team were really accommodating,” she says.

### Shore Excursions

The top cruise lines not only offer groups diverse and customizable entertainment, but in-depth cultural education as well, via shore excursions. For instance, on the Windward Islands, the Af-flink group enjoyed catamaran cruises in St. Lucia to the mainland, where the 300 participants had lunch on a plantation. Cunningham also recalls a visit to Pompeii during the Italy cruise: “Every docent on the bus was extremely knowledgeable in the area, and they divided up our group so that we were able to have real (intimate) tours of Pompeii.”

These tours can extend to the nearby Isle of Capri, “which is really beautiful,” comments Faldmo, who brought a TV station group on a cruise to the area. “They get to learn a lot of Roman history. The Isle of Capri has been a vacation spot since the Caesars really.”

In the Galapagos, Celebrity offers “nat-

uralist guides that take people ashore for tours,” Vogt relates. “These are locals that live and study the Galapagos ecosystem and they sail with us, giving talks. So it’s a very unique opportunity.”

On a Norwegian cruise to Alaska for a 40-attendee retail client of Columbus Travel, a shore excursion in Skagway included a train ride up to the Yukon to a miner’s camp dating from the Gold Rush era.

These kinds of immersive experiences are what it takes to incentivize many of today’s well-traveled salespeople, and, thankfully, the cruise industry is adding more every year.

### Cruise News

#### Carnival Cruise Line

The 3,934-passenger Carnival Horizon is scheduled to enter service in March 2018. The second in Carnival’s Vista class, the ship will offer many signature onboard activities, such as the SkyRide, Imax Theatre, WaterWorks aqua park, Seuss at Sea program and Alchemy Bar. A wide range of accommodation categories will be available, including the popular Havana staterooms.

Carnival recently announced that in 2020 and 2022 it will launch two new 5,200-passenger ships powered by liquefied natural gas. They’re the first-ever “green cruising” design ships to be based in North America and will be the largest ships in Carnival’s fleet.

#### Royal Caribbean Cruises

The company recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the STX France shipyard for a fifth Oasis-class ship. A fourth Oasis-class ship is currently under construction at the shipyard in Saint Nazaire, France, and is planned for



Credits: Celebrity Cruises

Celebrity’s shore excursions, from Alaska to the Galapagos, and onboard spa experiences are part of a well-rounded incentive program.

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(L to r) Norwegian Cruise Line's Norwegian Dawn, "Burn the Floor" show and Great Stirrup Cay, Norwegian's private island.

delivery in spring 2018. The fifth is pending for spring 2021.

This summer, the brand revamped *RoyalCaribbeanIncentives.com* in order to deliver an interactive experience that includes a fresh look, streamlined site

***"We totally converted the club on the top of the ship and brought in an onshore production company."***



**Kate Guimbellot**  
VP Field Development and Training  
Silpada Designs  
Lenexa, KS

navigation, rich content and exclusive planning tools such as a destination search widget, Event Customization Guide and RFP function.

#### Celebrity Cruises

Celebrity's new "A Taste of the Caribbean" package features interactive cooking demos, wine-tasting events and sail-away parties at its unique lawn club on the top deck of the Solstice class ships.

The overarching program is Chef's Market Discoveries, which offers culinary-themed shore excursions complemented by a locally inspired onboard meal.

"What's unique to Celebrity — and this is great for meeting planners to know — is that we're really more of an adult-oriented brand," says Vogt. "So we're really focusing on dining; cuisine is a big pillar of ours. The fellow who runs our culinary division is a Michelin Star chef." Faldmo appreciates not only the brand's F&B quality, but the value as well: "I find Celebrity for the mid-level price does a great job with food."

An especially creative culinary idea is Celebrity's "Taste of Film" special event, which is ideal for corporate groups. On the Millennium class ships, "we have added a rooftop terrace with a big screen that becomes this really cool evening party type venue," Vogt explains. "We pair cocktails that will be introduced in the movie, and serve appetizers and drinks at these poignant moments during the film."

Looking to the future, "We're in the design phase for a brand new class of ships called Edge," Vogt says. "It's revolutionary and will introduce things that have never been done in the cruise in-

dustry before. There will be four ships, and they will feature spaces for private functions that we've never offered before." Two Edge-class ships are planned for fall 2018 and early 2020, and another two potentially for fall 2021 and fall 2022. They will be sized between the line's existing Millennium-class and Solstice-class, at 2,900 capacity each.

#### Norwegian Cruise Line

Two of NCL's ships have recently undergone renovations: The Norwegian Dawn and Pride of America. The former vessel's enhancements include two new restaurants, and three new bars and lounges, updated design and décor in all public spaces, and a refurbishment of all staterooms including a complete makeover of the ship's signature Garden Villas, some of the largest suites at sea. The Pride of America's renovations include newly designed public spaces, new venues and refreshed décor in all staterooms. Both projects are part of The Norwegian Edge program, a \$400 million investment launched in January that encompasses the entire guest experience. Another upgrade, completed in June, is the quadrupling of internet bandwidth across the company's 23 ships, including the Oceania and Regent Seven Seas brands.

Through next summer The Norwegian



(L to r) Oceania Cruises in Portofino; sundeck and saltwater pool; and the Culinary Center, Oceania's hands-on cooking school.



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Edge initiative will be revolutionizing the company's 250-acre private island oasis in the Bahamas, Great Stirrup Cay, adding luxurious amenities, new adventure activities and expanded dining options. The company also is developing its Western Caribbean destination experience, Harvest Caye, Belize. It will be the country's only cruise ship pier, allowing groups to easily depart to mainland Belize for an excursion.

"Norwegian reminds me a little of the old Avis commercial 'We try harder,'" Faldmo comments. "I find all the cruise lines do a great job; I love working

***"What's unique to Celebrity — and this is great for meeting planners to know — is that we're really more of an adult-oriented brand."***



**Lisa Vogt**  
AVP, Corporate Incentives & Charter Sales  
Celebrity Cruises  
Miami, FL

with every one of them. But I do find Norwegian hustles a little bit more on pricing and value."

#### Oceania Cruises

Similar to Celebrity's Chef's Market Discoveries, Oceania's Culinary Discovery Tours enable guests to experience the cultures of the world through their cuisines. A master chef instructor from the ship's hands-on cooking school, The Cu-



Silversea Cruises' Silver Muse.



The spa infinity pool on Regent Seven Seas Explorer.

linary Center, accompanies participants. The tours are being expanded to include some of the Mediterranean's most intriguing destinations for the 2016 season: Antibes, France; Bandol, France; Casablanca, Morocco; Catania on Sicily, Italy; Heraklion (Iraklion) on Crete, Greece; and Palamos, Spain.

#### Princess Cruises

Launched this summer, Global Partners + Local Experts partners Princess with Cruise Europe, Cruise Baltic and Med-Cruise. The goal is to provide guests with authentic and exclusive onshore experiences in key regional cruise destinations.

The line's new 3,560-capacity Majestic Princess, sister ship to the Regal Princess and Royal Princess, sets sail next April. Features include Princess' largest top deck pool, 12,000 sf of high-end retail space and balconies on all outside staterooms.

#### Regent Seven Seas

The Regent Seven Seas Explorer, touted as the most luxurious ship ever built,

was christened in July. The all-suite, all-balcony 750-guest ship calls on iconic destinations throughout the Mediterranean from Saint-Tropez and Ibiza to alluring Venice and Cinque Terre.

Regent Seven Seas has begun a \$125 million refurbishment program to extend the Explorer's luxury standards to all ships in Regent's fleet. In addition, a sister ship to the Explorer will debut in 2020.

#### Silversea Cruises

Due for completion in April 2017, the brand's new ultra-upscale vessel Silver Muse will launch from Monte Carlo and spend the spring and summer months around the Mediterranean. A total of 52 UNESCO World Heritage Sites will be featured in Silver Muse's 2017 itinerary, from ancient Greek temples to historic Caribbean fortresses. The ship houses 286 suites, with a capacity of 596 guests, and will essentially be a larger, more luxurious version of the Silver Spirit, built in 2009.

Cunningham selected Silversea for Afflink's last three incentive programs "because of their quality, ownership, the level and the class of their ships, the quality of their food and the attention to detail," she explains. "We've been on either the Silver Wind or the Silver Cloud. It's easy for us to have a group session, let's say after breakfast in the theater area. They have private boardrooms, as well as a library where people can meet. There may be a group of top-level owners and they want to get together with a couple of owners on the membership side or the distributors side, and they may set up a table for 14 for breakfast. So they will do whatever they need to do as far as accommodating any type of meeting."

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# The Event Safety Net

By Mark Rowh

## Ensuring Onsite Security May Be a Planner's Most Important Challenge

One of the most stressful challenges for any meeting planner is dealing with safety and security. That might mean spending untold hours worrying about what could go wrong. Or it may involve dealing expeditiously with problems, or even full-fledged crises, once they occur. Considering all the possible scenarios, it's hard to overstate the importance of solid preparation for safe meetings.

"It's critical for meeting professionals to take security and risk management issues into consideration for events that they are planning," says Matthew Marcial, senior director, events for Meeting Professionals International. "No matter how large or small the scale of the event, it is important for planners to communicate plans to their staff and attendees."

In fact this type of planning may be the most vital of all the many tasks undertaken for any event.

The safety of attendees should be the No. 1 priority for meeting planners, according to Deborah Sexton, president and CEO of the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA). "As meeting planners look ahead to an upcoming conference or event, security concerns and risk management issues must play a major role in the conversations with staff members, venue operators, hoteliers, shuttle bus companies and any other vendor involved in the experience," she says.

Every event, large or small, should be evaluated and produced with the organization's risk management and security protocol in mind, notes Sue Heley, national account manager for Experient, a global events management company. "Proactive planning and training are necessary to protect the people, property, financial investment, information and image of the organization," she says.

Such measures obviously make good business sense, but in a big-picture sense, they also take on an even higher level of importance.

Peter Tarlow, Ph.D., an expert on risk related to tourism and event management and president of Tourism & More based in College Station, Texas, says that taking security risks into account is both a moral and legal obligation.

"Not to take risk into consideration is in and of itself to assume a major risk," he says.

### Preparing for Any Contingency

There seems to be no end to the possible scenarios any planner might face at any given time or in any location. From something as serious as a terrorist attack to less dramatic but very real problems such as mass food poisoning, the commitment to prepare for a wide range of possibilities seems an imperative.

"Many of our members have had experiences where their advance planning has come into action," Marcial says. "One of the common learnings is that you have to be prepared to quickly react and stay calm in any emergency situation." He points to medical emergencies, natural disasters and active shooter scenarios as just some of the risks to address.

Sexton recalls a situation faced by colleagues at the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority the day of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing. One of the team's venues, the John B. Hynes Veterans Memorial Convention Center, is located half a block from where a bomb exploded.

"At the time, one meeting was in the process of moving out while another was moving in," she recalls. "The MCCA team evacuated the building, brought in bomb-sniffing dogs and swept the entire facility to ensure the safety of everyone involved in both meetings."

Of course no one could have anticipated this specific event. But given the reality that these and other types of risks do occur, solid contingency planning should be a key part of the overall event planning process.

"Every meeting's safety relies on mitigating potential physical risks in the surrounding environment," Sexton says, pointing to the host hotel, the convention center and any other venue involved in the program. "Meeting plan-

ners should work with the host city's DMO and venue operators to understand the security procedures in each of these environments. Before selecting a venue, make sure that the security guidelines align with your organization's security needs and expectations."

It's always better to be proactive rather than reactive when planning risk management for large events such as meetings and conventions, says Lee Mandel, CEO of IntraLogic Solutions, a security solutions firm in Massapequa, New York.

He points to his firm's recent work with several clients to assist in coordination for the first 2016 presidential debate in New York. "Many surrounding businesses are concerned with security, and many systems have to be coordinated with local law enforcement," he says. "The quantity of meetings involved concerning coordination of security is significant but is necessary for ensuring a smooth, safe event."

### Onsite Precautions

Mandel cites the most important risks to address in planning and conducting meetings as egress points, communication methods and technology integration. "It's important to know how to quickly move people in and out of a facility and also how to correctly communicate with local law enforcement," he says. "It is also critical to make sure all security and communication technology is interoperable." He notes that use of his company's custom PSIM (Physical Security Information Management) software has helped clients tie in these many disparate systems on a temporary basis without much cost outlay.

Kerry Bannigan, cofounder of New York-based Nolcha Shows and Nolcha Events, says that planning safe meetings must include attention to access control.

"Sadly, in today's society we have to account for weapon control," she says. Pointing to possible situations such as someone not agreeing with topics being addressed or having a grievance with a well-known attendee, she recommends due diligence (and security background checks on attendees where necessary) to identify red flags to be addressed pre-event.



**Matthew Marcial**

Senior Director, Events  
Meeting Professionals International  
Dallas, TX

***"Planners should always have a plan A, B and C for security and risk management situations. Work closely with your destination and venue partners to ensure close alignment with all of the advance planning."***





**Deborah Sexton**  
President and CEO  
Professional Convention Management Association  
Chicago, IL

***"We live in a world where data is extremely valuable, and meeting planners deal with private attendee information including email addresses, passwords, credit card numbers and more. ...Every meeting planner needs to consider potential cyber theft issues."***

"Screening and inspections are an efficient step once onsite to also tackle any physical elements such as weapons or strange objects being brought onsite," Bannigan says. "It's best to eliminate any concerns where possible at the beginning."

Heley recalls an incident where a conference attendee received a mysterious piece of mail while staying at the hotel. When it turned out the envelope contained white powder, the hotel was promptly locked down. Attendees were all moved to the ballroom, four city blocks surrounding the hotel were evacuated, the FBI was onsite immediately, and the media arrived in droves.

To come to grips with the issue, Heley coordinated a meeting to introduce the organization spokesperson, legal counsel and the authorities to one another. The hotel was instructed to make no mention of the name of her organization. Staff took a head count and security check-in of participants, and made phone calls to attendees not in the ballroom to ascertain their location and safety.

"We were able to resume our conference the next day with an adjusted agenda," she says. "However, the lost time and distractions did not allow for a productive day."

### Considering Threats to Information and Equipment

Sexton notes that outside of physical risks, meeting planners must address potential cyber security issues.

"We live in a world where data is extremely valuable, and meeting planners deal with private attendee information including email addresses, passwords, credit card numbers and more," she says. "With this in mind, every meeting planner needs to consider potential cyber theft issues."

How secure is the network within the host venue and the host hotel? Is the Wi-Fi protected with a password? What steps are they taking to ensure registration kiosks can only be accessed by staff members? Does your organization have cyber insurance coverage in the event of a data breach? These are all questions that should be addressed, Sexton advises.

"Large events, meetings and conferences can be a prime target for hackers seeking to gain access to network security and personal data," says Carl Herberger, vice president of security solutions at Radware, an international application delivery and cyber security firm with North American headquarters in Mahwah, New Jersey. "However, various precautions can be taken to improve cyber security at large events."

Herberger says that attendees should opt to use a VPN, or virtual private network, when connecting to



**Peter Tarlow, Ph.D.**  
President  
Tourism & More  
College Station, TX

***"Each situation is different, and ignorance or political correctness are the biggest risks. The same goes for ignoring a risk and for not understanding if the risk is one of safety or of security. Assuming one locale is like another is another potential weak point."***

public Wi-Fi at conventions to protect their personal data.

"Unless you can verify that a Wi-Fi network is completely secure, you should take into consideration the possibility that software and devices might be installed on a network by hackers to monitor traffic and data transfer," he says. "AVPN can help prevent this, and will keep your private data and traffic more secure on these networks." If in planning an event you're not confident of the integrity of a network, one step he recommends is advising attendees to avoid logging on in favor of alternatives such as online access through cell phone carriers.

Conference attendees also should be advised to keep Wi-Fi and Bluetooth disabled on their phones and other devices unless they are logging on to a trusted and secure network. Another strategy is to use two-factor authentication for online accounts, when available, to add a second layer of protection in preventing access to private information. Participants might also consider resetting and changing passwords after logging on to Wi-Fi at events and conferences.

While of course the safety of people is the main concern, security of equipment and other belongings also merits consideration.

Robert Siciliano, CEO of *IDTheftSecurity.com*, notes that tablets, laptops and other items are often vulnerable to theft,

especially when conference participants leave meeting rooms for breaks. Efforts to hide them under folders or paperwork can prove fruitless.

"Many attendees and planners function under the false belief that the venue is secure and their valuables are, too," Siciliano says. "Despite what the venue staff says, you should always instruct attendees to remove valuables."

### Taking the Right Steps

"Planners should always have a plan A, B and C for security and risk management situations," Marcial says. "Work closely with your destination and venue partners to ensure close alignment with all of the advance planning."

Should the unexpected occur, it's important to remain calm and be in control of the situation as much as possible while quickly putting your emergency plans into action, Marcial advises. Also work with your team to prepare and execute a post-crisis communications plan.

Sexton agrees that having a crisis management plan in place is the most critical piece. "It's impossible to plan for every potential scenario," she notes. "But meeting planners can make sure that in the event of a serious security issue, each member of their teams understands their responsibilities."

Depending on the event, it may make sense to consider security measures such



**Lee Mandel**  
CEO  
IntraLogic Solutions  
Massapequa, NY

***"It's important to know how to quickly move people in and out of a facility and also how to correctly communicate with local law enforcement. It is also critical to make sure all security and communication technology is interoperable."***

## A Hotel Perspective

At the Inbal Jerusalem Hotel in Israel, security is at the forefront of every event. As general manager, Rony Timsit heads up the planning for safe meetings and other operations.

"Risk management is a high priority of our senior management team," he says. "It is a discussion that occurs every day at our daily management meeting, and we address the finer points more in depth with every event, meeting or group that uses our hotel."

The process has worked well for guests and partner groups in terms of mitigating challenges over the years. The hotel has a senior and experienced team that interacts with the GM and other executives on a regular basis.

"We are also in regular contact with government security officials so that we are able to tap into that network for information and resources as need be," Timsit says. "We are able to then filter that information into our daily management of the property and protect the comfort and safety of our guests." — MR





**Kerry Bannigan**  
Cofounder  
Nolcha Shows and Nolcha Events  
Delray Beach, FL

***“Sadly, in today’s society we have to account for weapon control. ...Screening and inspections are an efficient step once onsite to also tackle any physical elements such as weapons or strange objects being brought onsite. It’s best to eliminate any concerns where possible at the beginning.”***

### 3 Security Planning Steps

Security expert Peter Tarlow, Ph.D. offers these tips for planning safe meetings in a destination:

1. Meet with the local police or law enforcement.
2. Have a full list of specific questions rather than more general questions.
3. Look at a minimum of two or three different news sources and understand not only what is reported about a destination, but what is not reported in each one.

—MR

as additional monitoring at entrance points similar to TSA-style screening, Sexton says. She points to a recent report from UFI The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry showing that many trade show organizers are adding security measures at their events. “As more meeting planners recognize the need for enhanced physical security, we may see more of this activity at meetings, conventions and business events,” she says.

One approach is to ask yourself: What don’t I know about this location or situation? Tarlow says not knowing what the local risks are can be a major weakness. “Each situation is different, and ignorance or political correctness are the biggest risks,” he says. “The same goes for ignoring a risk and for not understanding if the risk is one of safety or of security. Assuming one locale is like another is another potential weak point.”

Contingency plans always should be developed for the “just-in-case,” Tarlow says. “Trying to develop a plan when it has not been previously considered and ignored is both difficult and dangerous. The best crisis management is good risk management. Think of the unexpected.”

Developing the right relationships can reduce the possibility of conflict, misunderstandings or delays at crucial times. “It’s important to build solid relationships way before the planning starts,” Mandel says. “I always suggest involving local authorities upfront and having continuous meetings with them in advance of the event.”

Mandel says that if a plan is in place

and practiced in advance of the main event, most circumstances can be handled with simple communication and/or evacuation protocols. “Staying calm and following a clearly thought-out, mapped-out plan created ahead of time is key,” he says. “You don’t want to think from the hip when time is of the essence.”

Bannigan also advises focusing on relationships. “It’s essential that the events team establish pre-event relationships with the relevant in-house or hired security for the event to discuss accountability and security measures,” she says. That should be supplemented with a list of numbers for external safety contacts such as the police.

Good communication is always a must, Sexton agrees, adding that meeting planners must have an effective plan to ensure that every attendee understands the situation. This might include social media, mobile app updates, email, in-room TV messaging and website updates. “If you find yourself in an unexpected situation, you must be able to spread the word to attendees about what they should do, where they should be and how they can stay safe,” she says.

Heley advises establishing emergency communication systems in advance and publicizing them to event participants and organization leadership, as well as designating an onsite crisis operations center and an alternate location for such operations. It’s also advisable to determine who will serve as the organization spokesperson and provide media training. “Threat assessment measures should be communicated regularly with local law enforcement and destination representatives,” she says. “And participants should be informed about crisis prevention and response plans, including safety check-in procedures.”

If a crisis or unexpected event occurs, some basic steps are called for. “Provide calm leadership and guide participants to a safe location and begin the check-in process,” Heley advises. “Alert crisis operations centers, and follow the crisis plan to the best of your ability. And utilize help wherever it is available.”

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## Vendor Relationships

Take the High Road to Foster Great Partnerships

By Mark Rowh

Some say that in business, relationships are everything. Of course, that may not always be true in an age of electronic transactions, but most planners agree that positive working relationships are a key to successful meetings. When it comes to vendors, such a sentiment may be a no-brainer.

"Building relationships with vendors is critical to a meeting planner's success," says Leslie Wong, CMP, who plans meetings as director of new markets and business development for HoneyBook, a San Francisco software firm. "The success of the relationship relies on both parties wanting to understand the business of the client beyond the short-term need." She notes that understanding the brand

marketing in New Brunswick, New Jersey, sees similar value in fostering positive relationships. "From hoteliers to DMC representatives, the travel vendors we select must be able to act as an extension of our organization and deliver services we can count on," he says.

Doyle explains that the stronger the relationship, the more likely the vendor will understand clients' needs and rise

"As a small business, we realize we don't have the power of a well-known name," he says. "But because we have built relationships with other vendors over the years, we have a history and relationship." He feels it's helpful to have an existing vendor vouch for his firm when working with a new vendor. Similarly, it's a plus to be able to rely on relationships built up over time.

***"When dealing with unforeseen circumstances and disruptions, we are in the trenches together, and we need to have confidence that we can really rely on our vendors as part of our own team."***

**Marty Doyle**, Senior Director of Travel Experiences  
Dittman Incentive Marketing, New Brunswick, NJ



"I can pick up the phone or text a long-time contact when I'm in jam," he says.

Cesari relates a recent instance where a client who was hosting a board meeting had a last-minute equipment need, letting him know at 5 p.m. on a Sunday evening that it was needed Monday

and long-term objectives is essential to make smart recommendations and discover solutions.

### Vendors as Partners

"When I create deeper relationships with vendors, we experience the mutual benefits of what I consider a partnership," Wong says, adding that this is definitely the case with a firm that serves as an exhibit partner.

"We brainstorm prior to any big project in our office, which is key to understanding our brand, product, long-term plans and business objectives," she says. "Because of this, they create unique solutions that meet my goals, and we benefit from building a foundation for long-term business."

Wong says clear communication is a must in vendor relations. "As a meeting planner, be clear about your business objectives with vendors from the beginning so that you're speaking towards the same goal," she says. "This will align everything from budgeting to execution." It also pays to over-communicate and plan buffers in budget and time, if possible. If you can, allow a cushion so that you don't find you and your vendors against a wall," she says. This could include load-in and load-out times, delivery times and budget.

Marty Doyle, senior director of travel experiences at Dittman Incentive Mar-

to meet them. "We see our clients as our partners and are always working to establish the same sense of partnership with our vendors," he says. "When dealing with unforeseen circumstances and disruptions, we are in the trenches together, and we need to have confidence that we can really rely on our vendors as part of our own team."

He notes that before pursuing a relationship, it's wise to be rigorous in the selection process. "A vendor partner must not only be able to provide creative ideas and onsite support, but should also be financially sound, have good infrastructure and offer an experienced team," he says.

Once a vendor is selected, being clear about program expectations and client preferences gets everyone off to a good start. "Let everyone involved know that you want and respect their ideas and recommendations," he says. "But be clear about your own knowledge of the client, as well as the tone and scope of the event." He adds that developing the program collaboratively, with frequent check-ins to make sure everyone is on track and on the same page, will help in assuring everyone's best efforts.

Positive relationships are important regardless of the size of the business, according to Jeffrey Cesari, CMP, president of Industrious Meetings, with offices in Philadelphia and Wilmington, Delaware.

morning at 9 a.m.

"The hotel was wonderful to help us get in touch with their in-house AV company, but they only had limited equipment onsite," he recalls. Along with the basic equipment, a Gentner box (telecommunications interface) was needed to allow the audience in the room and the presenter to have a dialogue.

Relying on a long-standing relationship, Cesari texted the national sales representative for his equipment provider and explained the situation. Within an hour, he received confirmation that the desperately needed equipment was going to be delivered Sunday evening.

"If the relationship wasn't in place, I don't think that would have happened, and ultimately the content of this important meeting would have been compromised," he says.

Even less dramatic situations deserve gestures of gratitude, Cesari adds. "I'm a big advocate of saying thank you and showing my appreciation," he says. "After a meeting, we thank our clients and stakeholder, but we also make a point to send a handwritten thank you note to our key vendors."

### Views From the Field

In considering the nuances of a great relationship, views from different angles of the planning process can be informative. Along with the thoughts of experi-



enced planners, the perspectives of hotel contacts and others who work with planners can be revealing. That's the case with tips such as those provided by Keryn Veripapa, director of sales at the Ritz-Carlton New York, Westchester.

"Anyone who has ever planned an event knows how important vendors are to its success," she says. That makes fostering teamwork and a trusting relationship vital even if time-consuming, she notes. "Relationships need to be fostered and take time to grow and develop," she says. When planners engage with the vendors, the vendors become more vested in the event and are encouraged to share responsibility in the success of the program."

Veripapa says that establishing a mutually beneficial relationship is critical. If both the vendor and the planner see the benefit, they will be equally dedicated to the program. At the same time, mutual respect and appreciation go far in fostering a good working relationship. "Very seldom do people grow tired of hearing someone say thank you," she says. "So it goes a long way."

Veripapa recalls booking a program with a client who said upfront not to expect repeat business since the preference was to use a different hotel each year. But through the booking and planning process the two developed a positive relationship, while her team developed a similarly strong relationship with the host of the meeting. "Since we executed a very successful program for them, they've been coming back for five years now," she says. "When you have common ground and understand the clients' needs, you gain their trust and their loyalty."

Elizabeth Nelson, director of catering sales at the JW Marriott Indianapolis, advises treating vendors like coworkers. She says that all the vendors you retain are an extension of your business and brand. "A vendor's work or products are usually one of the first visual aspects clients come in contact with," she says. "You want your vendors to

can be avoided, she notes, if all parties read and re-read all contracts and make sure there is upfront discussion regarding any fees or commissions that might be payable.

### Vendors as Resources

Nelson says that the knowledge vendors bring can be a boon. "We are all



***"The meetings industry is small. One day, that vendor may be a client or even a coworker. So always be respectful, regardless if the contact is a vendor, client or peer."***

**Jeffrey Cesari, CMP, President**  
Industrious Meetings, Wilmington, DE

care about your business and brand as much as you do, and having a good relationship with each vendor can make you stand out to clients more than the competition.

Nelson points out that there will always be some sort of last-minute need or client emergency. "Having those good relationships can help get you out of a pinch," she says. "This also helps with referrals. We like to share clients that may be a good fit for a particular vendor and in fact make recommendations all the time."

Nelson tells of a situation where the hotel's catering manager was working with a third-party meeting planner on an event. During the contract development stage, the meeting planner failed to mention that there was a commissionable room rate. By the time this came to light, the event had already been contracted, and the planner was not able to collect the commission. The result, not surprisingly, was a strained relationship. Such problems

experts in our field, but everyone hits a creative block sometimes," she says. "Reaching out to vendors as a creative resource and talking through ideas can help everyone excel."

Building great relationships with vendors and business partners is a must, says Alison Pearl Yassky, PR and marketing coordinator of the Castle Hotel and Spa in Tarrytown, New York. "They give us a support network to further our business. Partnerships with various business contacts encourage positive interactions that are mutually beneficial. In fact, we recently hosted a great relationship-building event between planners and our preferred vendors that was very well received."

Staying in touch over time is also a good practice, according to Nelson. "Keep vendors as a resource and don't just call them when you need something," she says. "I like to stay in touch on a personal level, which I've found has led to some great business and wonderful events."

Yassky also says that ongoing contact is a basic requirement. "Touch base with the vendors on a regular basis," she says. "Take an interest beyond the business aspect by getting to know more about their personal lives. When you get to know one another better, you are better able to partner up on business pursuits."

Offering value also is key, according to Yassky. She says that strong business

## Take the High Road

Relationships with vendors, just as with any interpersonal relations, can have their ups and downs. When that means encountering problems, it's best to take the high road. Here are three situations to avoid in dealing with vendors.

**1. Nasty emails.** If a vendor fails to deliver as promised (or more accurately when this happens, since every planner is sure to encounter this challenge) it may be tempting to fire off a scorching email. But typically, such a response will bring mixed results at best. You're at least as likely to anger the recipient as to bring any kind of positive change, and little good will be accomplished. At the same time, keep in mind that once you hit "send," your response can be forwarded to anyone. Even if you're the wronged party, others who read your message may see you as unreasonable or downright mean.

If you feel compelled to send an email complaint, choose your words carefully. Avoid derogatory language. Refrain from accusations based on assumptions rather than proven fact. And whatever you say, pause before sending. Keep the response in your draft folder for a few hours or better yet, overnight. Then review and edit once more before sending.

**2. Threats.** Perhaps even worse than a nasty email is a threat. Saying "we'll never use you again" may be justifiable, and actually may not present any problems. But harsher comments, such as threatening to spread the word with colleagues and damage the vendor's chances of getting business elsewhere, are not advisable. Ethics and perhaps legalities aside, such threats can lead to a war of words you don't need and possibly bring retaliation. Besides, just as with a nasty email, it's not in your best interest to be petty. So as a princess in an animated movie might sing, let it go.

**3. Lack of follow-up.** Ideally, the most serious problems encountered with vendors also will be the least frequent. But even with the most dependable vendors, mistakes will happen. To keep them to a minimum, good follow-up is a must. Once you've agreed on the specifics of any agreement, follow up repeatedly. If you've worked out details in a phone call, follow up with an email. If you've started out with email, place a subsequent phone call.

Don't assume that just because a conversation has taken place or a contract has been written, everything will be accomplished as agreed. Be a friendly pest, but be a pest. For a successful event, regular follow-up is a must. — MR



relationships often occur when both parties are able to offer value. "Instead of only looking at how the vendors can help us, we consider the value that we offer to them," she says. "In some cases, simply listening and offering business advice is the key value we add to the relationship. With a vendor, an opportunity for value is to provide new contacts or potential customers."

Yassky notes that while a meeting planner can be extremely helpful as another person on top of organizing the details of an event, information can get lost in translation when multiple parties are involved. When it comes to pricing, she says, there are details where it is vital that the communication only flow through the venue and the hosts. "Information can easily get passed along incorrectly when it goes through a chain of people," she says. "As a meeting planner, it would be helpful to make sure the client knows when it comes to specific details and pricing, that it's best just to contact the event and sales manager directly."

Yassky adds that good listening skills are also vital. "Actively listening to what vendors and other business contacts tell you is a large part of the communication process," she says. "Show that you are willing to step back and let others speak while you take it all in."

Even more important is building trust. "Trust and honesty fuel a positive relationship with both vendors and partners in the business world," Yassky says. "If you fail to interact honestly with your contacts, you develop a sense of mistrust that may cause vendors and partners to be guarded around you."

### A Matter of Respect

While it's obviously important to meet business needs, treating others with respect is an imperative with which everyone can agree. And besides being the right thing to do, it can pay off in the long run.

"The meetings industry is small," Cesari says. "One day, that vendor may be a client or even a co-worker. So always be respectful, regardless if the contact is a vendor, client or peer." **C&IT**

## Tips for Building Relationships

Keryn Veripapa, director of sales at the Ritz-Carlton New York, Westchester, offers these tips for planners to help build relationships with vendors:

- Plan projects clearly
- Share your knowledge
- Be honest and be yourself
- Communicate openly and effectively
- Manage your time and set/meet deadlines

— MR



# Destination



# Florida

Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort near Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

## Where Meetings, Events and Incentives Shine All Year Round

If America's first visitors were the crew helmed by Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León in 1513, then it could be said that Florida has been playing host to visitors for longer than any other state in the union. While Ponce didn't get to venture far beyond the swaying palms and silken sands lining the coast, the visitor infrastructure that followed in his wake has blossomed, and how — particularly for corporate and incentive groups.

Today's Sunshine State boasts an impressive variety of backdrops, large or intimate, and locations ranging from sleepy to downright buzzy — truly something for almost every style of gathering and budgetary consideration. And when it's time for a breather, meeting planners will find Florida replete with watersports options and theme parks, beachcombing and wildlife viewing, along with a climate that invites al fresco events year-round.

"The State of Florida has outstanding convention, visitor and tourism bureaus that go way above and beyond," says Jeremy M. Luski, founder and CEO of JML Worldwide, a New York-based global event agency start-up that placed clients in St. Petersburg. "The client is always No. 1 in the eyes of Visit Florida."

### Fort Lauderdale and Vicinity

With Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Tampa, Orlando and other airports offering nonstop flights from most North American cities, air access is a key reason meeting planners cite Florida as a leading choice for gatherings.

For Sandy King, director of executive support for Pike Enterprises, an energy solutions provider based in Mt. Airy, North Carolina, airlift and ease of access were "very important" in selecting a location for a 158-person meeting of the company's electric supervisors in February. Margaritaville, the \$147 million Jimmy Buffett-themed resort in Hollywood Beach, was her pick.

Situated on the barrier island, just six miles from Fort Lauderdale airport, the opening of Margaritaville in November 2015 has proven to be a vital catalyst to reinvigorate this once sleepy suburb. The 349-room resort instills a relaxed vibe from the outset, greeting guests with a flip-flop statue and chandelier of margarita glasses. Buffett's personal collection of surfboards is on display and a surf simulator next to the boardwalk lining the beach tempts the hang-ten crowd. But 30,000 sf of meeting space — indoors and out — make this also a viable landing for corporate groups.

"By far, this was the best venue of any we have used before,"

King says. "Once our group arrived, they did not have to leave the property for the duration of the meeting — everything was within walking distance. And the food was phenomenal at every meal. It did not taste like 'meeting' food."

"David Margolis was outstanding in getting this meeting put together for us," adds King. "Christina Tauceda was also invaluable — she was my onsite contact that took of everything and anything I threw her way. Every single person we interacted with was extremely friendly, yet professional. Meeting rooms were all very well set up, the traffic flowed in and out easily, the rooms were clearly marked, and the décor was beautiful. Once I ordered the audio-visual I could forget about it — everything was taken care of."

A few miles up the strand, the 240-room Sonesta Fort Lauderdale is laidback in its own, sophisticated way. With 12 meeting rooms, including breakouts, the resort offers 8,000 sf of meeting space, making the Sonesta a lovely beachfront option for more intimate gatherings. Pamm Houchens, trade marketing director for Maryland-based Aveniu Brands, an importer, marketer and distributor of fine wines in North America, said the hotel was "a wonderful partner" for her 40-person event in July.

***"By far, this (Margaritaville) was the best venue of any we have used before. ...And the food was phenomenal at every meal. It did not taste like 'meeting' food."***

**Sandy King, Director of Executive Support  
Pike Enterprises, Mt. Airy, NC**

Initial contact was with Paige Guiliano, and then Houchens was assigned to convention service manager Victoria Llano. "She was accommodating, and a jewel to work with on every level. She met every demand and was always available — extremely helpful for meeting planners.

"Meeting rooms were grouped together on the penthouse level, separate from other guests and more private," Houchens explains. "Each breakout and lunch was themed, and perfect for our small group." The hotel also was within easy driving distance to Fort Lauderdale restaurants that were supporters of the Aveniu wine brands — dine-arounds were conducted each evening.

Houchens reminds that, when considering Florida as a desti-



Turnberry Isle Miami is home to two 18-hole championship courses.



The Trump Spa Grand Suite at Trump National Doral Miami.

nation, planners should be cognizant of how heat and sporadic showers might impact outdoor activities. "Walk-throughs are always advised prior to arrival of guests. I would definitely take into consideration that the Sonesta has a small lobby bar, and large groups may find it limiting if there are late-night gatherings."

### Miami

Trimmed by luminous beaches and spiced with Latin culture, if one destination in Florida could be cited as "hot," Miami would be it. Just look at its airport numbers.

Domestic passenger traffic at Miami International Airport grew five percent during the first six months of 2016. Including international travelers, MIA served almost 700,000 more passengers than the same time period last year. And while the airport is currently served by more airlines and air cargo operations than any other U.S. airport, five more airlines will be added to the roster this fall, including the return of KLM and flights to Amsterdam.

Eden Roc, Miami Beach's iconic oceanfront Grand Dame, has joined forces with the Nobu team to create Nobu Hotel Eden Roc. An extensive renovation and restoration of Morris Lapidus' classic hotel has been overseen by noted architect David Rockwell, while the Nobu crew — chef Nobu Matsuhisa, actor Robert DeNiro and film producer Meir Teper — have collaborated to reimagine Eden Roc for a new era. The 214-room hotel, which opens this fall, will feature more than 70,000 sf of meeting and event space, a 22,000-sf spa and fitness facility, four swimming pools and, of course, the flagship Nobu Restaurant.

Also set to debut at the end of this year is a floor-to-ceiling renovation of the spa and fitness center at Turnberry Isle Miami. The luxury resort promises a progressive new look for the facility by award-winning design team Hirsch Bedner Associates, along with innovative new treatments and cutting-edge equipment. Turnberry Isle guests continue to enjoy two championship golf courses, two swimming pools and culinary expertise of celebrity chef Michael Mina at Bourbon Steak restaurant.

A \$250 million renovation of the Trump National Doral Miami was completed earlier this year with the arrival of 48 Trump Spa Suites designed by Ivanka Trump. The suites start at 998 sf and can be used for in-room spa treatments, bath butler service, or guests can trundle over to the resort's new spa facility, gilded with gold leaf Spanish Revival accents, right next door. The 643-room resort has four championship golf courses, eight food and beverage



***“The State of Florida has outstanding convention, visitor and tourism bureaus that go way above and beyond. The client is always No. 1 in the eyes of Visit Florida.”***

**Jeremy M. Luski, CEO**  
JML Worldwide, New York, NY



age outlets, and more than 100,000 sf of meeting space, including a decadent 24,000-sf ballroom.

## Orlando

While Florida boasts the longest coastline in the contiguous United States, and most of the state's hotel options straddle these shores, Orlando offers an alternate setting, one steeped in the thrills of the theme park capital of the world. For Jonathan Perlman, events director for Miami-based Zumba Fitness LLC, says there are no better destinations than Orlando for the annual 8,000-attendee meetings he oversees each July.

“We’ve been doing our event in Orlando for the past nine years,” Perlman explains. “It’s easy to fly in to, there are great hotels, great partners, reasonable rates and amazing event space.”

For nine years, the Zumba Instructors Convention has utilized the 1,639-room Hyatt Regency Orlando and 1,417-room Hilton Orlando next door, both connected to the convention center across the street. Perlman cites the resorts’ location — on International Drive, between Universal Studios and SeaWorld — along with the layout of service and event space as being key assets.

“They have a great distribution of space, and vendors that even-



Credit: Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa

The Presidential Suite at Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa.

tually become an extension of your team. They’re great partners — we would not change them,” Perlman adds.

The city’s Orange County Convention Center is the nation’s second largest meeting facility, with 7 million sf of total space. Orlando also boasts the second-largest concentration of hotel rooms in the country. For such a desirable destination, Perlman suggests booking multiple years to secure the best rates and optimal dates.

## Tampa Bay

Although Tampa itself is modest in size, as the hub for the St.

Petersburg/Clearwater communities, Tampa Bay encompasses Florida’s second largest metro area. As such, it has a number of big-city assets, such as its well-liked airport and a 600,000-sf convention center, but still enjoys a walkable downtown with lots of parks and nearby beaches.

Tampa International Airport is nearing completion on a \$1 billion renovation and upgrade project, with 50,000 sf of new retail and restaurant space opening this year. Served by daily direct flights from 50 U.S. cities, in 2017 the airport’s rental car center will be completed, reached by an automated people-mover.

A new addition for Tampa for amblers, joggers, and cyclists is the 2.4-mile Tampa Riverwalk, which links downtown’s most popular hangouts, including parks, museums, hotels restaurants, the Amalie Arena and the Straz Center for the Performing Arts. Guests staying at Le Méridien Tampa, just a few blocks off the Riverwalk, enjoy free bike rental with their rooms, and bike rentals are available at other outlets. The Riverwalk also is a designated zone for alcohol consumption, which means you can stroll the waterfront with a local craft beer purchased from adjoining bars and restaurants.

Tampa Bay continues to be Florida’s only destination offering CityPASS, the discounted attraction package. The \$99 (adult) ticket package covers admission to Busch Gardens Tampa Bay, Florida Aquarium, Tampa’s Lowry Park Zoo, the (Dale) Chihuly Collection, and more — tickets that, purchased separately, would total \$217.

Buffeted by year-round sunshine, Florida’s diversity of settings, attractions, resorts and world-class convention facilities, along with solid air access, make the state a clear leader for meetings and conferences. The only problem might be deciding where to land.

## New and Noteworthy

Receiving its first Forbes five-star designation in February, **Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa** did not rest on its laurels this year. The resort debuted its fourth restaurant, Breeze Ocean Kitchen, an al fresco oceanfront oasis that mixes Mediterranean elegance with that distinctly chic Palm Beach aura — a fusion sure to establish the venue as a winter social season hub. The new Sunday afternoon paella experience is spiked with live music and classic cocktails that sparkle with current mixology trends. Situated on a private sandy shoreline, the 309-room Eau Palm Beach has 30,000 sf of indoor and outdoor function space and an award-winning spa, making it a top pick for upscale meetings.

Palm Beach County’s new 21-story, 400-room **Hilton West Palm Beach**, which opened in January with 24,000 sf of meeting space, is the only hotel in South Florida connected to a convention center — The Palm Beach County Convention Center.

The 650-room **Fort Lauderdale Marriott Harbor Beach Resort & Spa** has almost 67,000 sf of total event space and a quarter-mile of private beachfront. Its acclaimed waterfront restaurant, 3030 Ocean, offers a private dining space flush with nautical elements, including doors modeled after sailboats with ship-inspired portal windows and ocean-inspired wall art. In addition to chef-



A meeting room at Streamsong Resort in Central Florida.

driven dishes emphasizing locally sourced seafood and meats, the restaurant’s raw bar brims with oysters, clams, shrimp, mussels, crab and lobster.

**Streamsong Resort**, which opened in 2013 in Central Florida, is almost equidistant between Tampa and Orlando. Streamsong has everything a group needs on its extensive property including 216 accommodations and 24,600-plus sf of flexible function space. In addition to two magnificent golf courses built on the dunes and craters of a landscape once dominated by phosphate mines, the resort offers guided bass fishing, sport shooting, archery, hiking and an opulent full-service spa, all easily incorporated into meeting and incentive programs.

The resort’s much-anticipated third course will open in fall 2017, giving golfers even more to experience. Designed by Gil Hanse, architect of the Olympic Golf Course in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Streamsong Black should be exceptional.

**Wild Florida Airboats and Gator Park** has added a 2,500-sf

Cypress Ballroom to accommodate small events, just 45 minutes south of Orlando along the shores of Lake Cypress. Guests can then climb aboard a U.S. Coast Guard-certified airboat and watch for alligators, eagles, wild boars, roseate spoonbills and other natives of the northern Everglades. The adjacent Gator and Wildlife Park features lemurs, sloths, zebras and other animals native to South America, Africa and Australia.

**The Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex** 45 minutes east of Orlando opens its new Heroes & Legends attraction in November. Separated into three distinct experiences, the expansion includes a custom-built theater, an interactive exhibit floor that uses holograms and radical augmented reality to interact with astronaut memorabilia and space program artifacts, and culminates in the U.S. Astronaut Hall of Fame, housed in a majestic rotunda. The facility lends itself to events focused on heroism.

Located at the tippy-toe of Florida in Key West, the adjacent Waldorf-Astoria properties **Casa Marina** and **The Reach** offer facilities for medium-sized and smaller meetings. Straddling the largest private beach in Key West, Casa Marina has more than 22,600 sf of flexible event space and outdoor reception areas, while the 150-room Reach two blocks away has meeting spaces and private dining for up to 40 guests. Combined, the two properties offer sand sculpting workshops, historic bike or jet ski tours, dolphin snorkeling trips, day tours to Dry Tortugas National Park, and they can arrange dinners at Hemingway House.

One of the northern Keys’ most popular properties, the **Ocean**



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**Reef Club** in Key Largo, offers teambuilding events such as bingo night, bungee run, the cardboard boat regatta and sand castle competitions. Groups also can enjoy field trips and eco-kayak tours through the Ocean Reef's Nature Center and group activities at the property's all-new cooking school, which accommodates cooking demonstrations, private parties and tasting events for up to 150 people.

The Ocean Reef Club features 30,000 sf of indoor meeting and function space as well as outdoor venues including two ocean-front pools and Lagoon Beach, which can accommodate up to 400 people. There are 36 holes of golf, a salon and spa, more than a dozen restaurants, a 175-slip marina and a private airport. In addition, the property's new Carysfort Hall, a modern meeting and function space features a 5,688-sf ballroom and five additional meeting rooms that can accommodate up to 300 guests.

Located just outside Jacksonville, **The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island** recently refreshed its 48,000 sf of meeting space. The resort



***“We’ve been doing our event in Orlando for the past nine years. It’s easy to fly in to, there are great hotels, great partners, reasonable rates and amazing event space.”***

**Jonathan Perlman**, Events Director  
Zumba Fitness LLC, Miami, FL.



has assembled localized excursions and teambuilding opportunities, emphasizing a Southern style for its upscale groups. Embark on a kayak tour through Amelia Island's tranquil salt marsh habitats for white egrets, herons and roseate spoonbills, or organize an excursion with the executive chef to discover the resort's colony of 200,000 bees, and see how their honey is used in cooking and at the spa.

**Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront**, Northeast Florida's largest convention hotel, has completed its multimillion-dollar



Credit: Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront

**Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront** overlooks the St. Johns River.

renovation of all 951 guest rooms while adding six hard-walled meeting rooms on the fourth level of the property's Terrace Building. The renovation also included corridors, the rooftop fitness center and Regency Club Lounge, which now provides additional space for small meetings, networking areas and workstations overlooking the city skyline.

A short drive southeast of Jacksonville, the AAA Five Diamond **Ponte Vedra Inn & Club** will complete a multimillion-dollar renovation of its Ocean House accommodations in fall 2017. Recently, the property renovated its Peyton House accommodations and oceanfront Surf Club, opened the new Tavern Lounge and upgraded its Wi-Fi system.

Planners and meeting-goers looking for a beachfront site find that **Sundial Beach Resort and Spa** on Sanibel Island is popular for laidback corporate events. Nine meeting rooms, each with comprehensive audio-visual capabilities, comprise the 12,000 sf of indoor and outdoor event space, and the resort boasts that it is the only destination on the Florida Gulf Coast's Sanibel Island capable of accommodating up to 300 guests.

New dining options include a daily breakfast buffet and a new restaurant, Shima Japanese Steakhouse & Sushi Bar, that can be used for private group events.

Currently, the Sundial Beach Resort and Spa offers special value for groups that book by December 31, 2016, including the following:

- Complimentary one-hour cocktail reception.
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For more information, contact [meetings@sundialresort.com](mailto:meetings@sundialresort.com).

### Zika Advisories

Meeting planners may be concerned about the possible impact of Zika, a mosquito-borne virus discovered in South Florida including Miami Beach and the neighborhood of Wynwood. Miami-Dade County's mosquito control team is regularly testing and spraying affected neighborhoods, but pregnant women are advised to avoid areas where Zika may be present. Regularly updated travel advisories from the Greater Miami and the Beaches Convention and Visitors Bureau are available at [www.miamianbeaches.com/travel-advisory-information](http://www.miamianbeaches.com/travel-advisory-information). The CDC also has information and updates at [www.cdc.gov/zika/intheus/florida-update.html](http://www.cdc.gov/zika/intheus/florida-update.html). (Also, see page 10.)

**C&IT**



Credit: Sundial Beach Resort and Spa

The Shima Japanese Steakhouse & Sushi Bar at Sundial Beach Resort and Spa in Sanibel Island, Florida.

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## Destination



# Las Vegas On & Off The Strip

Credit: Open Window Productions

## Find Your Desired Spot

By Christine Loomis

While The Strip is the epicenter of quintessential Las Vegas, the city has moved beyond its famous boulevard, revitalizing off-Strip neighborhoods and adding resorts, event centers and experiences to meet the needs of planners and attendees with a wide range of preferences. Of course, those who love the energetic vibe of The Strip can meet there. But planners desiring a setting a bit removed and more serene have options, too. The city's stand-alone event centers add still more to the eclectic mix.

*"Las Vegas in general is flexible and wants your business. The educated sales teams at the hotels and the other destination management partners will accommodate almost any reasonable request and are truly an extension of your team."*

**Brad Hecht**, Vice President, Travel  
Motivation Excellence Inc.  
Schaumburg, IL



Want to go farther afield? Reno and Lake Tahoe provide phenomenal meeting settings in an area enhanced by some of Mother Nature's most spectacular work.

### On The Strip

When it comes to on-Strip action, few companies offer the range of possibilities that MGM Resorts does. Within its fold are Aria, Bellagio, Delano, Mandalay Bay, Mirage, Luxor, Excalibur, Circus Circus, New York New York, Monte Carlo, Vdara, and, of course, MGM Grand. That breadth and depth of properties has given Brad Hecht the ability to bring in large programs to several of MGM's urban resorts. Hecht

is vice president, travel, with Motivation Excellence Inc., a Schaumburg, Illinois-based company that creates programs to engage, motivate and incent individuals to higher performance. In 2016 he booked groups at Bellagio, and he has programs for a large building-products client scheduled at Aria in 2017, Mirage in 2018 and Bellagio in 2019 and 2021. Each group is about 1,500 attendees.

"The hotels chosen filled the 'wants' of each of these groups, meaning they offer the location and the ability to make their space work for each group's needs," Hecht says. "Aside from the flexibility these hotels offer, the sale process has been exceptional. Our sales contact performs as a partner and asks the right questions in order for us to exceed our client's expectations. The exceptional working relationship we have with the sales teams at Mirage, Aria and Bellagio, and their extreme flexibility to get it done, have made all these groups possible."

Once Hecht's team selected and secured the function and event space "that best conforms to the groups' needs and allows our team to best execute the pro-

grams," he set up a variety of functions at the hotels, from meals and product demonstrations and exhibitions to big-name entertainment.

Hecht says the city itself makes meeting there easy thanks to "excellent hotel options, value in terms of room product, great amenities, built-in entertainment with little to no cost, and, of course, exceptional airlift. The choices," he adds, "are virtually endless, and the offerings can be tailored to meet almost anyone's needs and wants."

While he has not relied much on the Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority, he says, "It is always there to provide any support and assistance we need along the way. They have a strong team that wants to help us in any way they can."

For Hecht and his groups, the MGM teams have pretty much done it all. "The MGM property sales teams have

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***“M Resort is the epitome of perfect venues for a meeting of up to 300 people. It offers...excellent customer service and professionalism. It is the benchmark in event facilitation.”***

**Teresa Boone**, Director of Global Education  
Natus Medical Incorporated  
Jasper, GA

been there and worked creatively to get deals done,” he says, “whether pricing or multiyear deals.”

Many restaurants along The Strip have served as offsite venues for Hecht’s groups, including Jean Georges Steakhouse, Carbone, Prime Steakhouse, Fix Restaurant & Bar, Mastro’s Ocean Club, SW Steakhouse and Tom Colicchio’s Heritage Steak. There’s always a buyout of a Cirque show as well.

The biggest challenge of booking Las Vegas, Hecht says, is that “at times it is difficult to obtain our preferred Thursday to Sunday date pattern. We have to be flexible to work far enough out and look for holes and partner with these great hotels to make it a win-win for both parties.”

To those considering a meeting here he adds, “Las Vegas in general is flexible and wants your business. The educated sales teams at the hotels and the other destination management partners will accommodate almost any reasonable request and are truly an extension of your team.”

## Off The Strip

Set about 11 miles from the center of The Strip, M Resort Spa Casino gives planners access to all that Las Vegas offers but away from the inherent distractions of Las Vegas Boulevard.

Natus Medical Incorporated, a leading provider of medical devices, software and services for newborn care, neurology, sleep, hearing and balance, holds its annual sales meeting for 225 to 250 attendees every January at M Resort Spa Casino. Teresa Boone, director of global education, notes that there are many reasons they choose M Resort over and over, and its off-Strip location is one of them. “M Resort is not on The Strip and this is a big advantage for us,” she says. “While we are there to work, we still manage to have Las Vegas-style fun, and we do not lose attendees to The Strip. Our group is well rested and focused on the meeting, and we have a safe environment to let loose during the evening.”

The group is already booked at M Resort for 2017 and under contract for 2018. “We went with M Resort because of the outstanding meeting space. They have the capacity for large general sessions, multiple breakout sessions and social functions,” Boone says. “After our first year, we discovered that the cus-

tomers service from every department was exceptional and the staff ensured our meetings were executed flawlessly. We are constantly amazed to see the same faces year after year, and that is a very positive statement in that employees love working there — and it shows. Besides facilitating our meetings, M Resort is a lovely property with beautiful, comfortable sleeping rooms and excellent choices for food and beverage. It also provides casino action for those wanting to have a little fun in the evening and not be swept away by the Las Vegas Strip.”

For Boone and her group it’s the people that make the big difference. “People make an organization,” she says, “and M Resort excels! Brisa Villarreal, national sales manager, is amazing to work with. She’s kind and honest and always ready to do the right thing. Nancy Galt, director of catering and conference services, is a consummate professional, and we are 100 percent comfortable she is watching out for us in the preplanning, execution and post-meeting follow-up. She is detail-focused, yet continues to employ extra touches to make us feel we are her only priority. Aaron Hill, director of M Productions, is always flexible and accessible in meeting our AV needs and went out



Credit: M Resort Spa Casino

**M Resort Spa Casino offers 92,000 sf of meeting space, including the 25,000-sf M Pavilion, as well as outdoor options and Lux, a special event space on the rooftop.**

tomers of his way to design our Tailgate Party to huge accolades. He is creative and has a great sense of humor and helps bring fun to our meeting. There are so many people from the banquet staff to the spa to the ladies in Baby Cakes, the coffee shop, who are genuinely nice people and truly a delight.

“Talking about the spa,” she adds, “Spa Mio is one of the best in the world, and I’ve been to many!”

Typically the group uses the entire meeting space. Boone says the hotel is the perfect size and notes that, “while the meeting space is on its own level, all of the perimeter function space is easily accessible.” The hotel sets up multiple break stations so the attendees always have quick access to snacks and

beverages, and, Boone says “there are lots of options to mix up venues for breakfast and lunch.”

Ditto options for evening functions at M Resort’s event venues. “The variety is great,” Boone notes. “Lux offers wonderful views of The Strip from the top floor and cozy outdoor space including a fireplace — we are there in January so this is perfect.” She calls Vue another great party venue with additional outdoor space. “My attendees are inside in meetings all day, so the opportunity to be outside is appreciated.”

The group books M Ballroom for its awards dinners, which Boone says have received rave reviews. “It’s not easy serving 250 people at the same time, and the quality has been the best of any large function I’ve experienced,” she says. “I can’t say it enough: The food at the M is excellent! Finally, there is the Hostile Grape Wine Cellar. Wow! This is a great intimate gathering spot, and our executive team loves the opportunity to taste a variety of wines and specialty liquors. This is a perfect space for up to 100 people and provides a special touch.”

Like others, Boone points to the easy airlift into Las Vegas as a draw, especially for groups with attendees arriving from all over the world, as hers do. Not everyone stays the same number of days. “Our corporate offices are in San Francisco so Las Vegas is fairly close for those who come in just for the day. Many folks also come in a day early or stay a day or two afterwards to take advantage of the great restaurants, shopping and/or entertainment,” she says. “Las Vegas has it all.”



Credit: Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Las Vegas  
**A banquet setup in Muse Hall at Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, which will debut an additional 18,000 sf of meeting space this winter.**

In addition to using M Resort venues, Natus has hosted functions at the Smith Center for the Performing Arts and Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health, regional dinners at restaurants on The Strip, and teambuilding activities on and off The Strip. There have been no big challenges, Boone says, because “Las Vegas is set up for entertainment so the infrastructure is good.” To avoid traffic issues, she adds, they simply plan around peak traffic hours.

“M Resort is the epitome of perfect venues for a meeting of up to 300 people,” Boone says. “It offers variety in food and beverage options, entertainment, comfortable sleeping rooms, excellent

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Credit: The Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort & Spa

A lakefront event on the pool patio at The Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort & Spa in Henderson, a 30-minute ride from The Strip.

customer service and professionalism. It is the benchmark in event facilitation."

Also off-Strip, Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Las Vegas is sleek, contemporary, amenity-rich and well situated along Paradise Road. "The Hard Rock is about five minutes from the airport and about a mile from the Las Vegas Strip, the best of both worlds," says HelmsBriscoe regional vice president Michael D. Uhl.

This year the hotel is adding nearly 18,000 sf of meeting and function space, bringing its total to 110,000 sf with high-tech touches such as CAT5 cabling and a program to create customizable sound, light, mood and banquet packages. Among the Hard Rock's singular venues is The Joint, which Uhl calls "the differentiator."

"One of our customers had experienced incredible growth and wanted to have a celebration where they could basically take over the entire hotel, deliver their message in The Joint, a state-of-the art, iconic venue, and have phenomenal opening

and closing receptions for over 2,000 people incorporating a multitude of themes at the three Hard Rock pools."

That's something Uhl recommends. "If you can take advantage of the great weather in Las Vegas," he says, "a reception at the Hard Rock pools is one that your attendees will always remember."

In addition to the physical property, Uhl has high praise for the staff. "Sales at the Hard Rock is awesome. They get 'in the trenches' with you and are there before, during and after your meeting. The Hard Rock," Uhl concludes, "is a pleasure to work with and meet at!"

Both active and solitude-seeking attendees will appreciate The Westin Lake Las Vegas Resort & Spa's serene lakeside location, about 20 minutes east of the Las Vegas Strip in Henderson, Nevada. For outdoor enthusiasts, there's standup paddleboard-



Credit: Meet Las Vegas

Meet Las Vegas is a stand-alone high-tech venue with three floors of event and meeting space and an outdoor pavilion.

ing (and SUP yoga), kayaking, boating, hiking and even a gondola adventure. The scenic Lake Mead National Recreation Area offering even more great outdoors activities is about 17 miles away. Area golf courses accessible to hotel guests include the Reflection Bay Golf Course, one-half mile away. The resort's Moroccan-inspired Spa Moulay offers a full menu of spa treatments, and guests will find multiple dining and shopping options in the nearby village of Montelago. The property offers 493 guest rooms, more than 45,000 sf of function space and 50,000 sf of outdoor event space including gardens, terrace and much more.

#### Stand-Alone Events and Don't-Miss Activities

Las Vegas has no end of options for planners looking to create that coveted wow experience. Among them is the Sundance Helicopter terminal — complete with one of the city's decidedly wow activities.

Leora Azoulay, president/owner of Incentives by Design Inc., has been working with Sundance Helicopters for more than 15 years. She was thrilled to book the terminal in May for a U.K.

Sundance Helicopters offers private function space and services for up to 500 attendees at its terminal, combined with helicopter tours over The Strip.



Credit: Sundance Helicopters

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realty company client with 115 attendees. The group was based at The Palazzo Resort Hotel Casino. "Who doesn't love those suites?" Azoulay asks, "especially the Europeans who are used to tiny hotel rooms."

The plan was to offer guests Sundance's City Lights Tour over Las Vegas. When the terminal was redesigned, it became an added enhancement. "Here was our opportunity to combine flights and fantasy in one place," Azoulay says. "The Sundance terminal lends itself to special events with its architectural beauty and flow. Highboy cocktail rounds draped in floor-length black linens were scattered throughout the terminal and copper sculpted Kokopelli statues graced each table. As this was a post-dinner event, we offered an elegant dessert buffet with bite-



Credit: Caesars Palace  
Caesars Palace celebrated its 50th anniversary in August.

sized petit fours, mini fruit tartlets, cheesecakes bites, cake pops and chocolate-covered strawberries.

"The entertainment was roving. Costumed Cirque-style jugglers and mimes walked among the guests, and two acrobats rolled across the floor lining their bodies inside a hoop. A Native American flute player was positioned on the balcony and gentle calming notes filled the air with a mystical feel. As the guests enjoyed their surroundings, we rotated them through the flights so at all times they had something going on."

Azoulay calls the Sundance staff "the most courte-

ous and attentive team I have had the pleasure of working with in a very long time," noting that they even made the preflight weigh-in stress-free for guests. While she recommends the terminal as an event space, she adds, "I would strongly suggest including the City Lights flights as well."

the third 2,775 sf. In addition, an outdoor pavilion provides an additional 8,412 sf. Sales, event and catering teams can assist with every phase of planning and designing. Blue Man Group has permanent theaters and productions in five U.S. cities, including Las Vegas, where the specially designed theater at Luxor puts the audience close to the action. The mix of music, comedy and technology never fails to inspire, and because the shows are continually refreshed, planners can bring attendees back again and again. Among the options for groups are discounted tickets, meet-and-greet experiences, backstage tours and customized art with a company's logo. Groups can also rent the 830-seat theater for a meeting, followed by a Blue Man Group performance ranging from just a few minutes to a full 90 minutes. Groups of 500-830 can buy out a show. Additionally there are show-and-dinner packages, transportation options for 50+ and the lobby can accommodate pre-show receptions for up to 75.

### Always Something New in Nevada

Nevada is not a state to rest on its considerable laurels. At **Caesars Palace** the newly renovated Julius Tower welcomed its first guests in time for the hotel's 50th, yes, 50th, anni-



Credit: MGM Resorts International  
Rendering of the veranda, part of Aria Resort & Casino's \$154 million convention center expansion.

*"Here was our opportunity to combine flights and fantasy in one place. The Sundance terminal lends itself to special events with its architectural beauty and flow."*

**Leora Azoulay**, President and Owner  
Incentives by Design Inc.  
Las Vegas, NV



versary. Another Caesars property, the Rio, celebrated the opening of Guy Fieri's El Burro Burracho this year, and in June, Caesars started offering personal yoga sessions inside a cabin on High Roller, the world's largest observation wheel.

Caesars Palace is home to the newly transformed Omnia nightclub. The multilevel venue has an expansive main room dance floor and options for private group events in a variety of venues from the main club to the outdoor terrace or the private ultra-lounge.

The most recent addition to Caesars Palace is the upscale Montecristo Cigar Bar. Newly designed, the contemporary 4,000-sf space offers notable cigars and rare fine whiskeys. Spacious courtyard space wraps around the back portion of the cigar bar, and the 10-seat Vault allows small groups to create an exclusive experience.

**Aria Resort & Casino** announced a major expansion of its award-winning LEED Gold-certified convention center. The \$154 million project will deliver an additional 200,000 sf of technologically advanced, flexible meeting space across four stories, highlighted by stunning indoor/open-air spaces and a glass-enclosed venue with dramatic views of The Park and spectacular new T-Mobile Arena. With the completion of the expansion, Aria will feature more than 500,000 sf of meeting space for its luxury clientele.

In February, **Wynn Las Vegas** announced a major expansion with development of Wynn Plaza, more than 75,000 sf of luxury retail space. It's inspired by elegant Avenue Matignon in the Right Bank of Paris and scheduled to debut fall 2017. Still awaiting board approval is Wynn's plan for the Paradise Park expansion, slated to stand on approximately 130 acres currently

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Credit: Wynn Las Vegas

Wynn Las Vegas and Encore offer a combined 260,000 sf of meeting and event space. Wynn is planning major new expansions.

occupied by Wynn Golf Club. If it goes through, Paradise Park will add 260,000 sf of meeting space.

Always wanted to know what it's like to be a gondolier? **The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino** opened Gondola University July 1; it's available to groups as well as to the public and includes Venetian history as well as a hands-on experience. The Palazzo Theatre was newly redesigned in conjunction with the opening of Baz – Star Crossed Love, a new-generation cabaret where guests are treated to a high-energy mash-up of music, movies and the world's greatest love stories.

**MGM Resorts International** and New York-based Sydel Group announced a partnership to reimagine and rebrand Las Vegas' Monte Carlo Resort and Casino. The approximately \$450 million transformation, which will touch every element of the property, will include two distinct hotel experiences: a Las Vegas version of Sydel's widely acclaimed NoMad Hotel, and the launch of a new luxury hotel named Park MGM. In



Credit: The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino

The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino now offers the educational, hands-on "Gondola University" experience, available to the public and to groups.

addition to fully redesigned and renovated hotel guest rooms, each hotel will feature innovative and exciting food and beverage experiences unique to the Las Vegas market, including the award-winning NoMad restaurant by chef Daniel Humm and restaurateur Will Guidara and Eataly's vibrant Italian marketplace with cafés, to-go counters and full-service restaurants interspersed with high-quality products from sustainable Italian and local producers.

Park MGM and The NoMad Las Vegas become the final pieces of MGM Resorts' complete neighborhood redesign of the central Las Vegas Strip neighborhood.

In Reno, **Peppermill Reno** celebrates 45 years in 2016. While it appreciates the past, the resort is looking squarely ahead to the future with innovations and renovations that include the redesign of Edge Nightclub, including the addition of \$150,000 in lighting, 440 sf of LED panels, custom wallpaper, original artwork and handcrafted crystal chandeliers. Also on tap for this year: a remodel of Oceano restaurant, remodel of

***"If you can take advantage of the great weather in Las Vegas, a reception at the Hard Rock pools is one that your attendees will always remember."***

**Michael D. Uhl**, Regional Vice President  
HelmsBriscoe  
Henderson, NV

Capri Ballroom, installing energy-recovery ventilators and improving air quality throughout the resort.

Elsewhere in Reno, the owners of the **Si-ena Hotel** announced that the property will be rebranded and newly opened as a non-gaming Renaissance Hotel in early 2017. Si-ena's casino, which closed summer 2015, has been replaced with a recreation area featuring indoor and outdoor bocce ball courts.

### The Bottom Line

By almost any measure, Las Vegas offers everything a planner needs to create phenomenal experiences for groups.

As Azoulay puts it, "Las Vegas continues to capture the world's imagination as the destination where anything is possible. It truly is one of the most exciting meeting and incentive destinations the world over."

Her one caveat for planners: "Don't try to go it on your own. Use a reputable destination management company to help you. Their contacts and connections are invaluable to the end result of your event." **C&IT**



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# On The Move



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The St. Regis Atlanta in Atlanta, Georgia, has appointed **Rosa Romero** as director of sales and marketing. Prior to joining the team at the St. Regis, she worked in her native Spain with Starwood Hotels for 15 years.

The Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort in Orlando has named **Melissa Robinson** as group sales manager for the Midwest and West Coast markets. She was sales and catering manager at Hollywood Beach Marriott in Hollywood, Florida.

The Westin Hilton Head Island Resort & Spa, Hilton in South Carolina, has named **Ryan Thompson** as director of group sales. He most recently served as national account director at Turnberry Isle Miami.

The Omni Homestead Resort in Hot Springs, Virginia, has named **Alex Gregory** as director of sales and marketing. He was director of sales and marketing for the Royal Palms Resort and Spa in Phoenix and Wild Dunes Resort on the Isle of Palms, South Carolina.

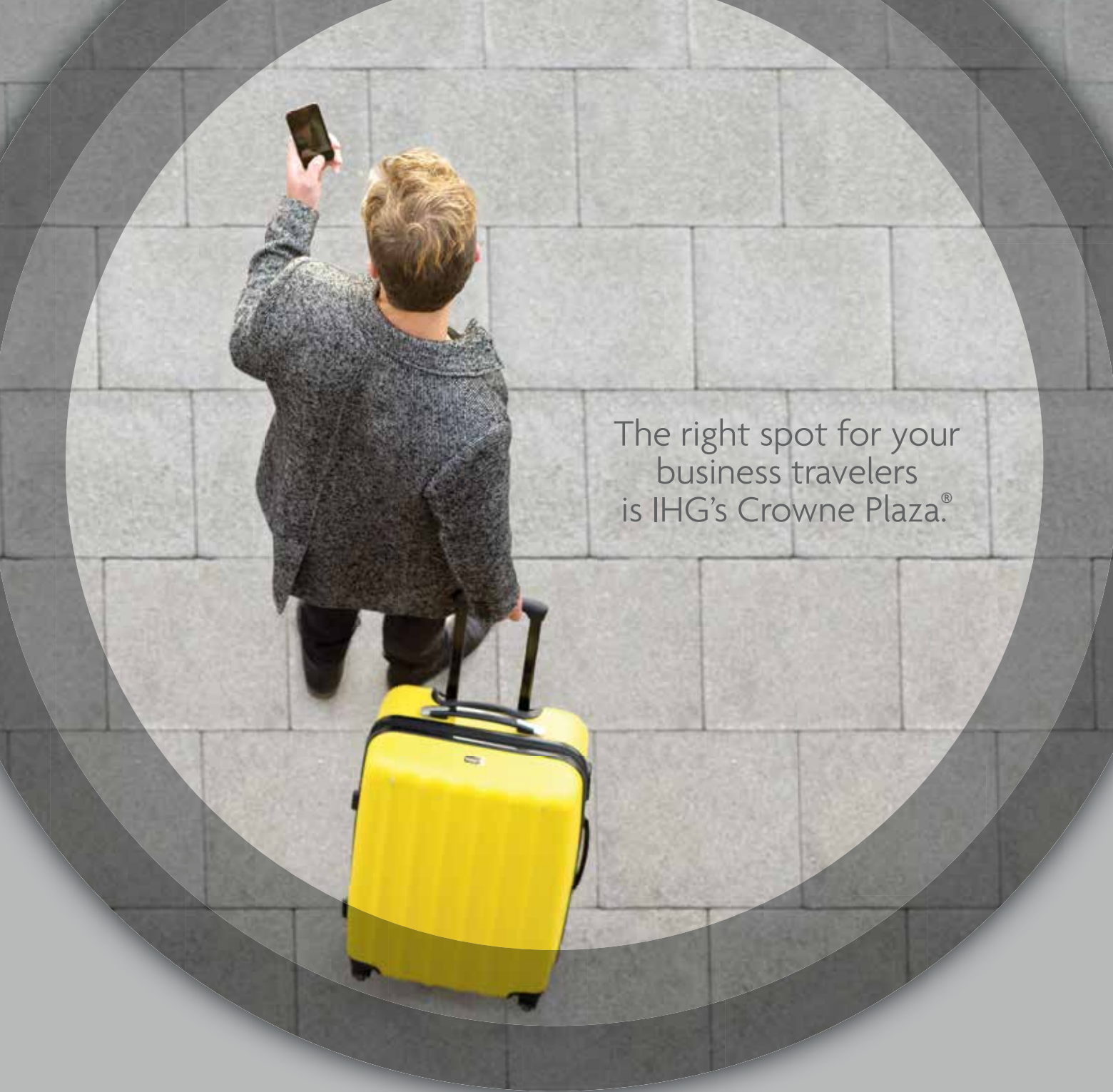
**Lauren Beegal** has joined United Incentives Inc. in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, as vice president, business development. Lauren most recently worked in event operations and sales development for a technology start-up.

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A woman with curly hair, wearing a sleeveless top and a patterned skirt, is smiling and holding a blue marker. She is standing in front of a group of people seated at tables in a bright, modern room with large windows. The background shows several people engaged in conversation or work. A large, light-colored hexagon is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing text.

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